

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

MICHAEL W. ALBIN

*Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
Initial interview date: April 19, 2012
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Mike Albin retired from the Library of Congress after 27 years of service during which he held a number of positions including 11 years as Director of the Library Field Office in Cairo Egypt. Mike spent most of his career in acquisitions for the library but he also served in the Asian Division and was Acting Director for Acquisitions and Overseas Operations.

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Family also resided in Johnstown PA, Hickory NC, and back to Gary IN

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Teacher English as a Foreign Language

1966-1969

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University of Chicago

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Masters of Library Science

University of Texas

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Librarian - Middle East Studies

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Librarian on behalf of the Library of Congress
Anwar Sadat

Washington, DC
Chief of Orders Division

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INTERVIEW

[Note: this interview was not edited by Mr. Albin.]

Q: Today is the 19th of April, 2012, interview with Michael W. Albin. And this is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training and I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy. And you go by Mike?

ALBIN: Yes.

Q: Well Michael, let's start at the beginning. When and where were you born?

ALBIN: I was born in Gary, Indiana, November 10, 1942.

Q: All right. Let's talk about your family a bit. On your father's side, where do the Albins come from?

ALBIN: The Albins arrived in North America in the 18th century, when an ancestor came over here from England. Family records show that our name was originally Albion. When the ancestor fought in the Revolution he dropped the "o" from the name, making a kind of gibberish word, "Albin," of it, because the word Albion had an association with, was synonymous with, England. That family followed the western trail from Pennsylvania, down to the Shenandoah Valley in Virginia, where they established the hamlet of Albin, currently on the northern edge of Winchester, Virginia.

Q: This town is family connected?

ALBIN: Yes. It's family connected, but there are no kin there now. They eventually followed the same migration path as Abraham Lincoln's family through Kentucky, Tennessee, eventually into Illinois. My family settled sometime before the Civil War in Central Illinois in a town called Neoga. My father was born in 1899 and spent much of his youth and early life in Chicago.

Q: What was he doing?

ALBIN: He was a financial person on La Salle Street in Chicago and didn't exactly prosper. He survived the Depression in good order but fell on hard times during World

War II when he made some personal investments that didn't do very well. He spent the rest of his life working as an accountant for construction companies. I was born in Gary, Indiana, outside Chicago. Dad moved with the family to Johnstown, Pennsylvania, where there were large construction projects in the steel industry at Bethlehem Steel Company. Another job took us down to Hickory, North Carolina, where there were hydroelectric projects with which Dad's company was involved. Eventually, we moved back to Gary. I attended Emerson High School in Gary and graduated from Bishop Noll High School in Hammond, Indiana,

Q: You were in Gary for how long?

ALBIN: I was born in Gary, Indiana, at Mercy Hospital. Our family lived outside of Gary at Cedar Lake, Indiana until I was in first grade when we moved to Johnstown, Pennsylvania.

Q: Do you recall Gary at all?

ALBIN: I remember Gary very vividly. I lived there on and off through my college years, because my father's job took us back there several times. My mother made her home there after he died.

Q: I've never been to Gary but I feel a personal attachment to it because I was chief of the consular section in Belgrade in the 1960s and we had lots of applicants who came to get visas from Macedonia particularly and you know what, it was always a bad- because they'd come to visit Gary and you know, a Macedonian peasant going to visit- I mean, this is big, big money; we knew they were going to stay so we turned down some. But there would be some, particularly the young women who were going to go visit an uncle; I knew they were probably going to get married but I figured, being judgmental and all that stuff, this woman will never get married but they all did. So I felt like I inadvertently helped populate Gary. Were you, I mean I guess at that period you weren't particularly aware of the ethnic-

ALBIN: I was extremely aware of the ethnic complexities of Gary. You couldn't have lived in Gary in those days and remain unaware of its ethnic jigsaw nature. It was an ethnic town. It was Serbs and Croats and Macedonians and Irish and Polish and Hungarians and blacks and hillbillies and all kinds of groups, and churches and languages, because the steel mills attracted them, you know.

Q: Yes.

ALBIN: And I worked in the steel mills during my high school and college time.

Q: Well then, on your mother's side, where do they come from?

ALBIN: My mother's side is Bohemian. I have no idea when they immigrated to this country from an area south of Prague, with which we've reestablished family connections

since 1990 or '91. In any case, the family is probably five generations here in the United States. My grandfather on my mother's side was born in Cleveland, Ohio, so he was Bohemian in name only. Mom's maiden name was Souhrada. The family had, I suppose still has, roots in northeastern Iowa, Calmer, Spillville, Cedar Rapids, maybe Fort Atkinson, those sorts of places. They are well known Bohemian and German areas, heavily Catholic. My mother's father, Grandpa Souhrada, moved to Chicago sometime in his career, earned a law degree and practiced law in the Loop at 82 West Washington Street where he had offices for decades and decades. I remember the building very well, visiting it many times when I was a kid. The building site is now occupied by the Cook County office skyscraper where the famous Picasso now stands guard at the front entrance.

Q: Oh yes.

ALBIN:

My mother was a grade school-educated gal; a flapper, as the term has it. She worked as a secretary or some such thing on La Salle Street where she met my dad and they were married. I'm the first of two children, born in '42. My sister was born in '45.

Q: Was your family Catholic or not or what religion; religion part of your upbringing?

ALBIN: My father was unchurched and wasn't baptized in any church until very late in life when my sister prevailed on him to be baptized. He was baptized in the Presbyterian Church in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. My family upbringing, our little family of four, was Catholic because of my mother. I went to Catholic schools and so did my sister. Catholic school meant grade school, intermediate school, most of high school and university as well.

Q: How would you say you fit with the Catholic family? I mean, you know, were you a, how one would say it, a devout Catholic, a practicing Catholic or a weekend Catholic? I mean-

ALBIN: Yes, I follow you, a holiday Catholic. I would say that for most of my adult- my early adult life I was a practicing Catholic. My sister remains a very devout Catholic, sings in choirs, daily mass, that sort of thing. I became what you might call a "cultural Catholic" sometime during my peregrinations overseas.

Q: Well then, how about where'd your family fit early on when you were a family together, politically?

ALBIN: Very Republican.

Q: Coming from La Salle Street and all that I would-

ALBIN: Central Illinois.

Q: Central Illinois.

ALBIN: Very Republican. I don't know how to characterize it other than that. I grew up in a household that despised FDR (Franklin Delano Roosevelt), despised the New Deal.

Q: That man in the White House.

ALBIN: That man in the White House, that miscreant. My grandfather, by the way, the ethnic Bohemian voted for Roosevelt the first two times but after that he decided that the fellow had been around long enough and would no longer support him. He was very active, my Grandfather Souhrada, in local politics. The Bohemian community in Chicago in those days, I guess I'm talking the teens, the '20s and the '30s, was centered in Berwyn and Cicero, suburbs on the West Side. One time he ran for mayor of Berwyn. In those days he was a staunch Democrat. He lost; he was never elected mayor but he was a Democrat but somewhere along the line in the midst of the New Deal and the Depression he changed sides. His mayoral campaign was cut short when, according to family lore, Al Capone asked him for a ride, during which he persuaded Grandpa to withdraw from the race. Grandpa remained good friends with Anton Cermak and other Chicago Bohemian luminaries.

Q: My grandfather on my mother's side was of German extraction. His name was Lattner. And had a-

ALBIN: Any relation to Johnny Lattner of the Chicago Bears in the-

Q: I don't know.

ALBIN: -from the Notre Dame football team?

Q: But I've never heard of that in- I don't follow football.

ALBIN: Ah.

Q: But he- I moved to California in '28. The Depression hit them like it hit everybody else. But I was born in Chicago.

ALBIN: Ah, you were?

Q: But moved to California very quickly thereafter.

In these movings around, by the time- Where did you first go to school?

ALBIN: I first went to school in Cedar Lake, Indiana, to Holy Name grade school in a rural area in Lake County, the county seat of which is Crown Point; a rural town where my dad and mom bought sort of a "farmette." Of about 20 acres.

Q: You say a “farmette.” So a cow and that sort of thing?

ALBIN: No, we never had any animals or any crops. He commuted to his job at the mill in Gary every morning. It was what I guess I ought to describe as a rural place but nowadays the real estate ads would say “farmette.”

Q: How did you take to school?

ALBIN: Oh, pretty well until I got to college when I went off the rails perhaps.

Q: Well what about- okay, as a kid, let’s say elementary school up. Were you much of a reader? I mean was the family-

ALBIN: Yes, a voracious reader.

Q: What- Can you think of any books that particularly inspired you or interested you as an early kid?

ALBIN: Well I’m thinking of “The Hardy Boys,” I’m thinking the Grimms’, Hans Christian Anderson, the classics. Then later Fennimore Cooper, Poe, Twain, O. Henry, J. F. Cooper, Walter Scott, all of these were in the home library or assigned at school. Franklin’s *Autobiography* was particularly influential. There were Catholic authors like Agnes Replier, and Chesterton. Mom populated the house with appropriate reading. Dad read history and Western novels, and these I read too. I loved newspapers and magazines, especially the *Chicago Tribune* and *Time* magazine. My reading broadened as I progressed through school and continued into college right up to the present.

Q: How about movies? Were you-?

ALBIN: My dad always made it a point to take the two of us, my sister and me, to Crown Point to the movies of a weekend, Friday or Saturday night, mostly cowboy movies.

Q: Double features probably?

ALBIN: Double features with assorted cartoons and shorts and fascinating newsreels with the sonorous, theatrical announcers.

Q: It was a crowded time at the movie theater.

ALBIN: I should think. In Crown Point there was bloody little to do other than that, yes.

Q: How about in elementary school did you find yourself particularly interested in some courses, not interested in others?

ALBIN: I was never good in math. I flunked math terribly. Eventually I'll get to that story when I get to college but math was always my downfall but I was always at the head of the class in anything verbal or history, term papers, book reports, projects like that.

Q: You know, practically everybody, myself included, our diplomatic desks are filled with people who are not very good in math.

ALBIN: No physicists here.

Q: No. I mean obviously there are the oddballs but for the most part it's reading, it's history-

ALBIN: It's writing. It's writing; I loved to write in those days.

Q: Did you- You know, in elementary school, first do you recall any teachers that sort of spring to mind that particularly-

ALBIN: In elementary school I had predominantly nuns, of course, except in North Carolina where in those days there were no Catholics. I went to public intermediate school in Hickory. Teachers never particularly bothered me. I liked most of them. They stimulated me. I don't have any bad memories. I don't have one that stands out as particularly good either or influential in my life.

Q: Yes well the nuns, so many people have stories about nuns rapping them on the knuckles.

ALBIN: Boloney. I mean I was rapped on the knuckles as well. So what!

Q: Absolutely.

ALBIN: Yes. I was rapped on the knuckles and I was made to sit in the corner and I was banished from the classroom.

Q: You probably deserved it.

ALBIN: Always. That's how crime-and-punishment is taught.

Q: Well how about did you find the Church oppressive or not oppressive or not- I'm thinking of priests who say do not see such and such a movie or this one is rated this; did it hit you at all?

ALBIN: No- no. But the older I got the more conscious I became of guidance from the Pope, as it were. I think in those days the Catholic press, which was prominent in my home because of my mother, was careful to point out the pitfalls of movies or books. But

this seemed to be leavened by Dad's skepticism and cynicism, Grandpa Souhrada's too. He was quite a free-thinker. There was always balance.

Q: The list of books and movies not to see were tremendous guide for the minions. I wasn't Catholic but it was a good guide to figure out which books and movies to see.

ALBIN: I see. Well you use it for what it's worth then make up your own mind. I don't remember ever consciously feeling deprived because of a list of movies in *Our Sunday Visitor*, for example, a weekly Catholic newspaper common in our house was. But still, Mom had a great influence on my sister and me in this regard.

Q: Did you find that being Catholic separated you in the various neighborhoods you lived? Ethnicity and religion often, particularly during the period- your youth and my youth. I mean you didn't cross over too much.

ALBIN: Let's see. Because of my father's job in construction, in heavy construction, steel mills, hydroelectric, that sort of thing, we were in industrial towns, where your Romanians, Poles, Hungarians and Irish, were predominantly Catholic or Orthodox. I mean the Catholic parishes were immense, but not so down in North Carolina, of course. In the period of my intermediate school we were exposed for the first time in my life, and my mother's life, to non-Catholics. I mean we were the only Catholics practically. The church was no bigger than this room, certainly no bigger than the ground floor of this house.

Q: Small room.

ALBIN: Very small. My daughter now lives- her family lives in Greensboro, North Carolina, not far from Hickory, and there are so many huge churches in Greensboro it's as though the Catholics have invaded and conquered North Carolina, at least Greensboro. But in those days that was not the case at all. So we came across teachers, colleagues and classmates. My mother came across lots of people in the neighborhood and in town who had never ever seen a Catholic. She had to make accommodation with a different way of thinking, where Catholics were as weird as Sioux Indians or Chinapersons or that sort of thing. They didn't know anything about what Catholics were. She had a lot of 'splainin' (explaining) to do. My sister tells a story of her teacher in sixth grade, I guess it was, who asked her to explain to the class what a pope is, to tell the class what the Church believed with regard to the pope. Well, my poor sister felt quite put on the spot. On the other hand the teacher felt that this was a great resource for kids who had no notion of a different faith.

Oh, by the way, those were days of segregation in North Carolina. So that was another cultural characteristic that we Yankees had to come to grips with.

Q: Well was this- Coming out of Chicago, was the being in the South and segregation, was this troublesome? I mean, or-?

ALBIN: To me, no. To me I am not a civil rights activist. I am an American and fervently believe in all that the Constitution calls for. I happen to have been at the very vortex, the very site of MLK's (Martin Luther King, Jr.) speech, the "I have a dream" speech on Constitution Avenue on the Mall in 1963 when I was an intern at the Commerce Department's Patent Office. I watched the entire event. I watched the buses roll in; I watched the hundreds of thousands of people assemble on the Mall. I was there at the creation, as it were, but I was never a bus rider or a Selma or a Greensboro sit-in person.

Q: Well did- When did you start going to high school?

ALBIN: When was I in high school? I must have started- I don't remember the dates at school but I started high school when my family moved back from North Carolina to Gary, where the company picked up another steel industry-related job at the Gary Works of U.S. Steel. I started at Emerson High School, where I had my freshman year, a very troubled year. It was the only troubled year in school that I ever had, perhaps, because of the ethnic strife that was patent daily.

Q: This would have been-

ALBIN: This would have been 1956.

The stress and strife was between the whites, whose population was diminishing- white ethnics, and what we used to call Puerto Ricans, and black students whose population was growing in Gary. I don't know whether they were Puerto Ricans or Mexicans or Bolivians or whatever but Puerto Ricans is what they were called when they weren't being called other things. But the mix of working class white kids, Puerto Ricans and blacks was incendiary. I don't know how the teachers could handle the situation.

Q: What- I mean, this was not an era of sort of civil rights having at least a name or not-

ALBIN: Not that early.

Q: -this was too early for that, this is- How did the strife, whatever it is, manifest itself?

ALBIN: Heckling, fist-fights, cliques, paling together around candy stores or drug stores or small businesses where if you were walking home from school, for example, or walking on an errand you would cross the street to avoid the crowd of kids, whoever they were, Hispanic or black or white, because the white kids were quite unruly, coming from working class families.

Q: So many came from the South up-

ALBIN: Well not so much that; it was mostly the ethnics, it was mostly your assorted Eastern Europeans generally, and whose fathers worked in the mills, whose mothers were housewives and who generally aspired to nothing more than working in the mills themselves. It seems to me now that most of the white kids went to my church or nearby

parishes, because most were Catholics. There were few white Protestants, as I recall, not in that part of town.

Q: Well did you find any attraction, absorption of say the Puerto Ricans to your group because you're all Catholic or not?

ALBIN: That's interesting. No, I don't think so. As I mentioned, I worked summers at two kinds of jobs and this was for eight years, high school and college. I worked either as a low paid, minimum wage kind of book page at the Gary Public Library at which I met a different class of kids. I remember one kid in particular. His name was Frank Morales. Frank was a Hispanic kid. He was not a classmate of mine, I met him through library work, and he was the one, freshman year in high school, who acquainted me with the delights of opera. A very influential kid, in this regard. I thank him to this day for that introduction to opera. We would stop at a record store on Broadway after work and he'd flip through and comment on the classical LPs. (long-playing records). I don't know what his background was, whether he even spoke Spanish, frankly, but he was a big influence on my musical education.

The other set of jobs that I had during those eight summers (except for the internship at the Patent Office) was on the labor gang at Gary Works. A very different class of people, hardly anybody my age; they were all your transplants from the South, either black or white. At my level, the very lowest of the low shovelers and sweepers, there were very few ethnics. The ethnics had moved on to the rolling mills and to the better jobs through the United Steel Workers Union and so I hardly knew them at all. It was the immigrants from the South, both black and white, as I say, that I shoveled, swept and sweated with.

Q: Were you union members or-?

ALBIN: I had to be. I had to. There was no right-to-work in those days in Indiana.

Q: Did you find the union influential or prescient or anything or how did you find-?

ALBIN: Well I don't know what I'm to say in this forum but let me tell you this: it was those experiences plus others later on that formulated my views about the labor movement.

Q: Well I mean-

ALBIN: You want me to be frank?

Q: Oh absolutely.

ALBIN: This will be on the record forever and ever. I've worked for the Library of Congress and they don't let things go easily.

Q: No but I try to- I mean- if you told me-

ALBIN: The life of the-

Q: - a certain period in life, well what the hell, I mean-

ALBIN: That's true.

Q: You know. What I'm trying to do here is to pick up attitudes and where attitudes came from. And somebody else will mine this and-

ALBIN: Yes, true enough. I'm historian enough to know that that's the case. In the case of the unions my family, as I mentioned to you, was very Republican. Well, my dad died in 1959, while I was still in high school. In any case my mother was just as Republican as he was. In order to perpetuate my job, my summer job through college she had to register Democrat because the unions looked at the registration rolls so she had to register Democrat otherwise I would not have been hired. Whether she *voted* Democrat or not they couldn't know, but her registration was enough to secure my job. Furthermore, among other life lessons, many other life lessons I learned in the steel mills was that the unions cheat like hell. I'll give you an example.

When I was working, in order to pay for my next semester at college I worked two shifts. I would start- we would work the morning shift or the day shift from 8:00 to 4:00, and then I would stay on for the 4:00 to midnight shift. We got time-and-a-half for the second shift. Well, the labor gang boss- By the way, if you want a view of what life was like in Gary circa 1960, watch the first 20 minutes of the movie *Rudy*. Have you seen *Rudy*? You're not a football fan. I will bring you a copy next time we talk so you can see *exactly* what my life was like in Gary in the 1950s and '60s..

In any case we would sit in the labor shack exactly as portrayed in the movie. There was a picnic table and two benches where we would eat lunch. For the 4:00 to midnight shift we would make a show of going out on the factory floor with shovels or brooms and all our equipment and then an hour or two later into the eight hour shift we would repair to the labor shack where we'd have a bite to eat from our lunch pails or brown bags and then, I was astonished the first time it happened, the labor gang boss- who was a union member and not supervisory-he was not management but just a grunt like me but more senior than I was- took the table out from between the two benches, took the first-aid stretchers from off the wall, stretched the stretchers between the two benches and we'd sack out for the rest of the night and go home when the whistle blew. That was your productivity and that was an example of how we did our 4:00-to-12:00 shift. Just one example of the culture of the United Steel Workers. Do you wonder why steel isn't made in the USA any more, why Gary is dead, and Wheeling, and Bethlehem and Youngstown, and Aliquippa, and Birmingham are dead cities?

At that point I realized that I wanted to wear the white hard hat in life.

Q: How about in your- as work experience did origin, nationality, ethnicity or something play much of a role? I mean the Macedonians got this, the Bohemians got that. You know, that sort of thing.

ALBIN: I don't know. On the street, of course, there was a pecking order. There were these gangs at Emerson High. In the classroom, on the school bus (when I transferred to Bishop Noll) the cool kids sat in the back. I think those favored places were allotted by force of personality, not by ethnicity. And girls occupied them too. There were the cliques and there were the favorites and there were the girlfriends; you didn't go out with her because she was a Pollack or he was a Hunky or what have you, all that stuff, but in the end it just- it either broke you or you grew stronger. I don't know.

Q: Yes. Well I remember as a kid, I grew up as an Episcopalian and not a very devout one and I was always warned, don't go out with Catholic girls because if you marry them they'll make their children become Catholics and somehow this was considered the end of the world.

ALBIN: That was exactly my father's mother's view of my mother, her future daughter-in-law.

Q: Yes, but it depended. If the Catholic girl had a presentable bosom I forgot all about this admonition.

ALBIN: Quite right, quite right.

Q: But in high school were there any particular courses or activities that you particularly enjoyed?

ALBIN: I think in high school I developed my ambition to spend a career overseas. I understood that that involved studying Europe and Latin America. These were not necessarily history courses as such. They were kind of super civics courses at my high school. It was a Catholic high school in Hammond, Indiana after I'd spent the year at Emerson in Gary. We'd be talking about some part of the world that I'd never been to that was exotic and strange and very attractive to me. And whether we were talking about the Far East or Peru or the Andes I was right there writing my essays and doing my library research on whatever country we were asked to write about, and getting A's. So I think that's when I decided I wanted to do something overseas. Didn't know what, didn't know how. I didn't come from a family that had any background in that, but I figured I'd gravitate in that direction.

Q: Did you go into any extracurricular activities or pretty much worked?

ALBIN: I played baseball on the scrub squad in high school. I was too short, I was too skinny and too unathletic for basketball or football and almost too unathletic for baseball. Just barely good enough, I guess. And I sang in different church choirs. I wasn't big on extracurriculars, I guess, now that you press me on the subject. I don't remember, I may

have joined the Latin club or the- this or that club but it made no big impression. At Emerson High School in my freshman year I was in ROTC and on the drill team. Bishop Noll had no such opportunity.

Q: What about dating in high school?

ALBIN: Wallflowerish but a couple of girlfriends. I had a very close group of classmates who triple dated, or multi-dated to homecomings and proms.

Q: This is very much the way.

ALBIN: Yes. And we had high school dances; probably you did too. This was a parochial school so they were supervised and chaperoned and I went to proms, I went to the proms on schedule, you know, junior and senior proms. But there was no romance that I carried forward into college and beyond.

Q: Well okay. You graduated from high school when? What year?

ALBIN: Sixty; 1960. Spring of '60.

Q: What did you think you- Where did you want to go to school, where could you go to school?

ALBIN: I wanted to go to only one school and I went there. That was Notre Dame. And I started there in September of '60 and I went right through four years.

Q: What attracted you to Notre Dame? Of course, I mean Notre Dame today has got a very fine record academically.

ALBIN: That might be because of the football. I went because of the academic reputation and I went because in the Catholic environment that I grew up in, the neighborhood environment and school environment there was no ambiguity about the encouragement of the school, the counselors, the teachers to push kids to Catholic colleges, whether Notre Dame, which was at the top of the Catholic school universe or any Catholic university. Because we were far away from the pull of New England, my family was far away from the gravitational pull of the Jesuits, into whose orbit I fell later, I never considered Boston College or Holy Cross. Notre Dame therefore stood out as the only possibility, because my grades were good except for math. So that's where I wound up.

Q: Did Notre Dame- I don't think of a religious order dominating. Did it have a-

ALBIN: In those days, from '60 to '64, it was very much a Catholic school; it was the Congregation of the Holy Cross, the CSC they were called. Ted Hesburgh, Theodore Hesburgh, reigned there at the time, adding to the luster.

Q: Oh yes.

ALBIN: -was the most famous of the lot.

Q: For so long.

ALBIN: Yes.

Q: What about- During this time you were growing up was anybody trying to push you towards the priesthood or not?

ALBIN: Never. Never recruited. I was always surprised about that. My mother was not on the recruiting squad, my teachers in high school didn't see potential there. At college certainly not. It wasn't until afterwards that I felt a call to the priesthood. It was a fleeting moment and didn't survive the first couple of chats with a Jesuit in Baghdad.

Q: I hate to bring this up but it's so much in the headlines; were you ever appraised or thinking back upon have problems of priests and little boys and that sort of thing?

ALBIN: Absolutely never. I've reflected on that a lot since it's hit the headlines. The possibility of such deviancies never, ever crossed my mind. And my sister the same way. Never once. This came out of the blue to most Catholics, I think.

Q: Yes, I went to an Episcopalian prep school run by monks and not- there wasn't a glimmer there, you know.

ALBIN: Yes, yes. I don't get it. I simply do not get it.

Q: Yes. Obviously it's there in certain places and-

ALBIN: I know. By the way, since we're talking about sexuality. I've known a lot of priests in my life. I used to be afraid of them as authority symbols. I used to be even more scared of bishops.

Q: Ooo.

ALBIN: Now it's all in a day's work. I pay no attention to their collars or their cassocks or what have you. However, over the years I've associated with many kinds, order priests, diocesan priests, and hierarchy of various kinds, not as a parishioner or communicant but collegially. With regard to the sexual part almost all of those clergymen, all of those who had an interest in the opposite sex left Holy Orders and got married. I've known at least a dozen of them to leave the priesthood for marriage.

Q: Alright, Notre Dame. What was Notre Dame like at the time, '60 to '64 was it?

ALBIN: Fun as hell. Too much fun. I mean four years of fun.

Q: Okay well let's talk about it. What sort of things were you-?

ALBIN: Well my grades went to hell. A gentleman's C was all I aspired to and all I got.

Q: I'd like to point out though that when you talk about a gentleman's C there used to be such a thing, purely recognized a good gentleman's C was fine for grade inflation.

ALBIN: Yes, I know. You're right, Stu.

Q: Today it would be a gentleman's A.

ALBIN: Remember Roger Maris when they put an asterisk beside his home run total? Well they should have an A with an asterisk on college transcripts.

But I retained a gentleman's C and I spent my entire time going between the libraries, swatting up the term paper that was due the next morning and in the art department drinking homemade wine. And dating. It was fun. Great fun. In spite of that, I learned because I had great teachers. I read the books. I participated in the seminars. I wrote the papers. I just didn't care about the grades. Some of the profs were clerics, Fr. John Dunne in philosophy, for example. Some of them were laymen, Paul Bartholomew for constitutional law, Gerhart Niemeyer for political theory. Great teachers. I had formative experiences with such teachers. We had core courses in those days; we had to take four years of theology, four years of philosophy and then the rest were electives. Well I wasn't a math major, that's for sure. Through the four years, until the very end I had no idea what I was going to major in. I had to pick something so I pinned the tail on political science. The readings were spectacular Hobbes, Locke, *Federalist*, Arendt, Aquinas, Machiavelli, Marx, Morgenthau, (who later became my thesis advisor), Snow, Maritain, Kennan, Braudel, Bloch, Collingwood, Maritain, Kierkegaard, de Chardin, the whole pantheon of dead white males (except for Arendt). Don't forget, Notre Dame was as much a liberal arts school as a Catholic one. There was an outstanding university library, with open stacks. I spent more of my time in the library than anywhere else. In some respects it was an even greater facility than the much larger Harper or Regenstein libraries at the University of Chicago, which were frightening in size and inconvenient in their dispersal around campus. At Notre Dame the collection, while still rich, was smaller but more accessible. I acquired the foundation of research skills there.

Q: Did- What was the student body like? It was all male at the time, right?

ALBIN: It was. Good for you.

Q: I mean was it sort of an ethnic mix or was it-

ALBIN: That's a good question. That ethnicity that I grew up with in Gary and Johnstown in a steel environment and the industrial environment dropped away. Middle class, Irish, yes I would say upscale and predominantly Irish Catholic. I don't remember any Protestant buddies, roommates, characters that I paled around with; they just weren't around. I had lots of Italian friends too.

Q: Did the election-

ALBIN: Very few blacks.

Q: Yes. Did the election of 1960 with John Kennedy running, being Catholic and all, did that hit you all or not?

ALBIN: I was chairman of the Republican Party platform committee in that election and I had to present the Goldwater platform to the mock convention. Goldwater was not the Republican nominee, of course, but he lost at our convention. I forget who won, maybe Rockefeller.

Q: Well it was Goldwater- I mean Kennedy and Nixon in 1960.

ALBIN: Indeed it was but we're talking about the campus mock conventions. Yes, there must have been somebody for Nixon but that was not who I was with; I was with Goldwater.

Q: Did you find was there a- after the election of Kennedy many people I've talked to were coming out of school were inspired by Kennedy to ask not what you can do- or what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country, that type of thing. Did that hit you at all?

ALBIN: It didn't. Most anything a politicians says is meaningless clanging. Kennedy's dictum is no exception. I was certainly not inspired, although for lack of anything else to do I joined the Peace Corps the following year.

Q: Yes. Yes but- no, I mean it was a certain change of attitude.

ALBIN: Not in me. What I liked about Kennedy, the only thing I liked about Kennedy -- my views on him have changed little in the intervening decades -- was when he went head to head with the steel industry and the steelworkers union. It was the only time he showed any real national leadership. But even that turned sour in the end.

Q: Well I remember Truman doing that but-

ALBIN: No, no it was Kennedy for sure. I thought he had more cojones than I expected him to have.

Q: Yes I- No I was- I mean Kennedy was interesting, I supported him but I didn't fall in love.

ALBIN: Yes. I thought the whole family was corrupt from the old man right down through.

Q: Well Bobby Kennedy was a piece of cake.

ALBIN: Sure, yes.

Q: Boy oh boy. He was not a favorite of mine.

ALBIN: Yes, they were- I never fell for the Kennedy mystique and whether RFK, JFK or any of the subsequent Ks.

Q: Well then the- Did the school- were- did civil rights begin to stir within the school-

ALBIN: Yes but not within my loins. It was there as an element that was so far from the mainstream- on campus; I'm talking only on campus- that it was almost indiscernible.

Q: I'm surprised because I mean, Notre Dame is in, well in Indiana, up in sort of the black belt or at least-

ALBIN: Well the industrial belt.

Q: -industrial belt and all and I would have thought there would have been more of a spillover of sort of racial tensions and that sort of thing.

ALBIN: Ah. If you're talking about South Bend itself with the Studebaker plant, the Bendix plant, the Anderson windshield wiper plant down the road, those were the days of strict class segregation. Class segregation. So Notre Dame was on the outskirts of South Bend in a nice neighborhood far from the industrial part of South Bend and Mishawaka and their industrial plants and their service industries so there was no class mixing. What you might call a progressive stream on campus was a hothouse stream that eventually came together in the huge movement of the late '60s and '70s and the Vietnam. All of that came after I graduated.

Q: Yes.

ALBIN: But this was early days and I was not vanguard by any means.

Q: Did any particular countries strike you? I mean that you were really interested in areas or-?

ALBIN: No, no. But I maintained that thirst for travel that I mentioned earlier; but never had an opportunity to actually go anywhere. I didn't do the junior year abroad thing. However, when I panicked toward the end of my senior year, realizing that my job applications were not bearing fruit I applied for the Peace Corps. I put in my countries of preference. I think maybe we had to choose two or three in order of preference. I remember putting Thailand as number one. I don't know why I did that. Oh yes, I do remember why. At the time, my mother, who lived in Gary, had a boarder whom she took in pro bono for local Catholic high school. This lady was a Vietnamese immigrant and we

were one big happy family, my mother, Phi and I, along with my sister, we would always come home from school and we would take our Thanksgivings there and so forth. And we were very close to Phi. She was a very companionable person and she'd endure my practicing French with her. She's a widow now; she lives out in Monterey, California, and spent her career as a teacher at the Monterey Language School. She was a Vietnamese teacher, she and her husband both. Anyway, that's where they wound up. Her husband was not her husband in those days, he was merely a suitor. In any case, I put Phi down as a reference on my Peace Corps application and she responded confidentially. She later told me that she had not recommended me for Thailand because, as she said, "not Thailand because he does not like hot weather." In any case, the Peace Corps decided for me, choosing Afghanistan. Did I choose Afghanistan? No. Would I choose it again if given the choice? In a heartbeat. I've been trying for the last two years to get back to Afghanistan but nobody's hired me. So that's how I was chosen for Afghanistan. It was as good as any other part of the world, I thought at the time. And it had the advantage of my never having heard of it before—therefore it offered adventure and mystery, dysentery too, as I came to find out, and a lifetime commitment to the study of Islam and the Middle East.

Q: Well this is extremely early years-

ALBIN: Yes.

Q: -for the Peace Corps. How did sort of the Peace Corps apparatus choose you as far as you can see and use you?

ALBIN: Good point. How did they choose me? I think they were not very choosy. My group was Group Four in Afghanistan, '64 to '66, 1964 to 1966. We were a good group. I don't remember how large, probably 60-some people of which maybe 50 stayed the course of training, which took place in Vermont the summer of 1964. As soon as I graduated from college I went home, packed my bags and was on a plane to Vermont. The training was conducted by the Experiment in International Living, if you'll recall that outfit. It goes by a different name nowadays, I think. It seemed to be a pretty well run outfit -- at least to me. We had a summer's worth of language and cultural training. I'd say it was more than adequate as a preparation for the country. Having gone through other training exercises the USG (United States Government) provides I'd say it was above average. It was informal and laidback, but effective, in contrast to some of the Army training I received in later years. In specific, the language training in Farsi, or Dari, as it has come to be called, was well-designed along up-to-date pedagogical principles and well-taught by qualified, enthusiastic native speakers. The cultural awareness portion of the curriculum was an adequate alert to the foreign-ness we were to encounter in this most foreign land.

Q: Well now when you went through this, this is in Vermont?

ALBIN: Yes, in Brattleboro, Vermont.

Q: Did you feel that it gave you a leg up when you got to Afghanistan or not or-?

ALBIN: Linguistically yes. I mean we weren't completely at sea. I think the Farsi course was competently taught and competently designed for the era. Don't forget this was the mid '60s and teaching foreign languages in general was evolving out of medieval methods of grammar instruction, declensions, conjugations, irregular verb lists, ablative absolutes and all the rest of that stuff to something more pragmatic, idiomatic and conversational. Peace Corps did a good job of it. I think the Peace Corps in those days was probably at the forefront of linguistic pedagogy, at least for Farsi. There were two weaknesses, however. First, we weren't taught how to read the language. Second, I should have been taught Pushtu instead of Farsi because I was assigned to a Pushtu-speaking province. I don't know how Monterey or the Foreign Service Institute handled new trends in teaching, but in my opinion the Peace Corps did an admirable job.

Q: Yes well Monterey was language sentence drill. It wasn't terribly grammatical- it wasn't centered on grammar; it was on speaking.

ALBIN: Yes, that's the way we did it. And I'm sure somewhere in the bowels of Washington the DLI (Defense Language Institute) and Peace Corps were coordinating in some fashion, not very sophisticated perhaps, but paying attention to what the other was doing. The major impetus of language teaching reform came out of the University of Michigan to a large degree, or maybe DLI as well. In any case University of Michigan, seemed to have a role in pioneering reform, based on the research of Lado and Fries (Robert Lado and Charles Fries). Michigan may have had Defense funding. I just don't know.

Q: When you say "DLI," that's Defense Language Institute.

ALBIN: It's what I mean, yes. Do they run Monterey anymore?

Q: I don't know but I just- for the people reading this-

ALBIN: Oh, okay.

Q: -I'm just trying to spell out what-

Did- What were they training you to do?

ALBIN: I was trained to teach English, which was another element of the training in Vermont. I had no classroom experience of any kind coming into the program. We had practice sessions and we had critiques and tutorials in elementary linguistics. If you asked if we were well prepped for our jobs I would say Peace Corps did as good a job as they could have possibly done in a three-month training period. Here again, the teaching techniques we learned were based on University of Michigan research as refined at Columbia University.

Q: Had you had any training in language? I assume you had Latin.

ALBIN: I had Latin and German and a smattering of French in college but I was not good in any of those languages. I didn't pay much attention, because the training in high school and college was very old fashioned. For example, at college they began German by having us read the *Nibelungenlied*. Imagine!

Q: Can you characterize or describe the group that you were with?

ALBIN: Yes. You asked what my specialty was; most of us were TEFL teachers, that is, Teaching English as a Foreign Language. There were nurses, there were a few ag specialists, agricultural specialists, people who knew how to dig a latrine or had basics in horticulture or irrigation or knew how to drive a tractor, none of which skills were particularly applicable to hard scrabble or terraced farming. Afghans have sophisticated farming methods based on centuries of practice with rudimentary tools. Different regions employed different methods according to climate and terrain. I guess my Peace Corps colleagues brought some skills to people in the Helmand Valley, for instance. At least they got their hands dirty and they knew how to repair a tractor or pump, or how to dig a well; and they may have had some knowledge of hydraulics to get water to a piece of land.

Q: Well then what were they telling you about the cultural government of Afghanistan?

ALBIN: We were given courses, classes not courses, classes by a future cabinet minister and vice-president, as a matter of fact. This was Hedayat Amin Arsala. The classes were heavy on history: the history, the ancient history and the 19th century: Alexander the Great, the Islamic middle ages, the Ghaznavids, Timurids, and so forth, the Durani dynasty and the place of Zahir Shah in the family tree. We read Fraser Tytler's history and all we could of anthropologist Louis Dupree, and *After You, Marco Polo* by Shor, and Lady Sale's *Journal* of the defeat/retreat/massacre at Kabul. I read Kipling, Justice Douglas's *Beyond the High Himalayas* and Afghan historian Abd al-Hayy Habibi, some of whose writings were available in English. There were also some short works in a popular vein by Nancy Hatch Dupree. We were given a lot of area studies, sensitivity kind of training on the basics of Islam, Afghan ethnicities, about the famous don't-point your-feet and don't-eat-with-left-hand kind of training that they're still giving at culture classes everywhere. Some things never die and remain part of the culture curriculum for whatever agency you're working for. I still get tripped up on etiquette from time to time, like forgetting to begin and end meals with an invocation.

We were given a smattering of common proverbs to use in everyday situations. We were instructed in the no-nos of photographing to women. They instructed us that the people were called *Afghan* and the currency was called *afghani*. Forever after we felt superior to everyone who didn't know this. We were instructed about Afghan politics, especially the vexed problem of Pashtunistan, which was a hot issue in those days. We were given copies of the new Afghan constitution and were urged to read it. They gave us the HRAF

(Human Relations Area Files) studies to read. We were given a lot of food to eat, various kinds of Afghan food our Afghan teachers prepared for us.

Q: Thank God it was good.

ALBIN: Oh yes.

Q: It's great food.

ALBIN: Oh golly. Although once I hit the ground in Afghanistan there was never a well day. Unfortunately, gastro-intestinal infections poisoned my entire stay in the country. When I left after two years I weighed 105 pounds and I looked like I was coming out of Belsen or Treblinka or someplace like that. I was medevaced (evacuated for health reasons) from my provincial post to Kabul after one year of being chronically sick with dysentery. Our refrain was "Every little breeze seems to whisper disease."

Q: Well then off you went. I mean what- how did you- where did you go and what were you doing?

ALBIN: I mean to tell you. Everything was so strange and wonderful and diarrhea-producing. It was indescribably strange. No place could have been stranger. I have been to stranger places since but in those days for a 21 or 22 year-old, boy I tell you that was as strange as it got.

Q: Well how did- Okay, you're- get on a plane and where'd you go and what'd you do?

ALBIN: Got on a plane; yes. I got on a plane. Was it my first trans-Atlantic? Yes, it was. We landed eventually in Tehran where we had to overnight. And I don't have much recollection of Tehran except to say that in the morning, the following morning when we were transported from the downtown hotel to the airport to catch our flight to Kabul, I was appalled to see taxi drivers actually sleeping in their cars. And I don't mean just nodding off at the wheel; I mean stretched out on the seats. I thought, "These poor guys, don't they have a home to go to? Are they homeless?" Homeless was not a phenomenon in those days in this country but I assumed that these people didn't have a home. Well, the cultural preparation in Vermont didn't stretch to all the ways people accommodate an all-night job. And then looking back on it, didn't I sleep on the stretchers in the shack of the labor gang? So I guess it wasn't so strange after all.

Q: So but then you flew to-?

ALBIN: To Kabul.

Q: Kabul.

ALBIN: Yes.

Q: And did they- was- did they use darts or what to assign you to places or how did they-?

ALBIN: Might just as well have. Frankly don't know how they made assignments. I wound up in Laghman province, if you have a map here... Anyway, it's east of Kabul, due north of Jalalabad. Bordering the high ranges of Nuristan.

Q: Yes well there's the map.

ALBIN: Yes. Northeast of Kabul -- the back of beyond. It was nowhere. It was in a mountain valley formed by two parallel rivers, the Alishang and Alingar, beautiful rivers, beautiful countryside, beautiful green fields where they grew grain and opium poppies, depending on the season. And the mountains of Nuristan towered above you from some 30 or 40 miles north of the little mud hovel where my buddy and I, my partner and I, Joe Basille from New Jersey, may he rest in peace, lived. Joe stayed there teaching a full two years because he wasn't as sick as I was. The two of us stayed in a little hut that the provincial governor, in cooperation with the provincial directorate of education put up for us in the schoolyard. It had two rooms and a lean-to kitchen that was built as an afterthought. It was made of mud bricks and straw, plastered over with some sort of gypsum or rough material of some kind, and roofed with straw and mud. We lived there for a year without any amenities whatsoever but for a small gas stove and a kitchen table and two charpoy beds, string beds, no running water. The water was- I don't know- I don't recall offhand how we got water for cooking, drinking or any other purpose except to say what water there was not safe for human ingestion. There was no such thing as bottled water in those days. Water had to be boiled vigorously for a while or drunk as tea. There was no toilet until Joe rigged some sort of deal at the far end of the football field, at least 100 yards or more away. We had no bathroom other than the open field or the governor's compound, which was down the street, a five or 10 minute walk. It had a bathroom and shower.

Now let me talk about the governor for a moment, the provincial governor of Laghman province. Laghman is L-A-G-H-M-A-N. It's not often in the tales of war over the last 12 years. But it's often enough mentioned for me to realize that it's a dangerous place, but not a frontline place. It was and is a Pashtu- speaking area, not Farsi, which was one of the very difficult parts of my stay in Laghman, in addition to the health problems, because we were taught Farsi at training camp in Vermont. They hadn't taught us a word of Pashto and I, given the exigencies of classroom preparation and health problems, had no time or inclination to study Pashtu. So I got by with what Farsi I had. As it turns out, over the course of years the older I got the more I developed a sense of language learning and an ability to learn languages. It was a skill I never had earlier when studying Latin, French or German. In any case the difficulties of Pushtu were more than I cared to face. The provincial governor and his American wife were our salvation, Joe's and mine. He lived down the dirt road from us in a compound that was not at all luxurious but was pretty comfortable compared to the hovel that Joe and I lived in. The governor's name was Habib Khaliqi. Wonderful man! I would say to a 21 year-old he combined the wisdom of Abraham and the common sense and political acumen of Jefferson. He

managed that province gently but firmly in those peaceful times. He himself was a Pashtun -- from Kandahar, from a completely different part of the country but that he was a Pashtun put him in a strong position with regard to relations with the population of the province. He was a graduate of the American University in Beirut, that's where he met his future wife, Virginia. She was a nurse in Beirut, if I recall correctly. I have not been in touch with them for many years. Virginia was from a small town in southwestern Colorado. She was a country girl, the actual picture of a country girl, tall, rangy, self-reliant, just exactly the kind of person you would expect to survive in an isolated Afghan environment- in any environment except an easy urban situation. Suburban life would not be for Virginia.

Anyway, Habib and Virginia and their young son, Tamim, became all the friends that we had and they became very close friends, and as I say our salvation. They fed us food that was safe to eat; they gave us water that was fit to drink. They gave us conversation that was understandable and challenging and informative. Without them I would have turned tail and gone back to Kabul most probably. Anyway, I survived for a year until the dysentery got so bad that the Peace Corps doctor in Kabul said, "You've got to be transferred; we're not going to let you stay out there as sick as you are."

Q: Let's go back to the year you were there. What were your classes like?

ALBIN: My classes were unspeakably primitive. Joe and I taught under a tree. There was a co-ed schoolhouse. The classes were not co-ed but the schoolhouse was. The school was built out of the same material as our hovel so they weren't discriminating against the foreigners in architecture. The school was first grade 'til they ran out of people who could teach. I don't remember what the Ministry of Education's rules and regulations were. Our fellow teachers may or may not have been qualified. My kids and Joe's kids were the younger ones. They were not older than, fifth grade, fourth or fifth grade. I have gone through snapshots that I took in those days. I see older kids in those pictures but I don't see our younger kids. In the Middle East, the school population can be quite old for grade, especially in undeveloped areas or countries where the population has suffered dislocation. So the fact that you have tall, mature kids in the early grades is not unusual. I doubt the school went into high school. I don't remember ever seeing or teaching a high school class. The building probably had six classrooms and a director's- a principal's-office and maybe a workroom for the teachers and that was it. Joe and I were not so fortunate as to have a classroom, we taught outside under a tree, as I say. Kids populated the school by the hundreds. It was a very popular place. Parents wanted the kids to go to school. There were no buses, there were no facilities to get the kids to school so they came on bikes or they walked from tremendous distances.

We taught outdoors. Joe had his tree and I had mine. As I recall they were mulberry trees. We had lots of fruit falling on our heads at mulberry season. Getting chalk or any supplies was a battle royal. The school had none. Getting supplies from the Peace Corps headquarters in Kabul was an adventure both bureaucratically and logistically. Anyway, chalk was the most valuable commodity you could imagine. The blackboards themselves

were scrap lumber, like 2x4s nailed together and painted black. The kids sat on the ground. We taught all day, with an occasional tea break.

The Peace Corps was to provide our textbooks and supplies. Well, Kabul was six about a day's drive away, mostly over challenging roads. Our little village, Tigari, was on a rough road running north along the Alingar River from Jalalabad. Phone connections were difficult. We had to use the phone in the governor's office and pray that we could get a line to the embassy, which in turn passed us to the Peace Corps office. Ordering material was difficult and delivery was difficult. They, the Peace Corps office, finally got us supplies but the teaching material that we had at the outset and perhaps for most of the year was nearly useless. For books, we had antiquated British texts of the Michael West variety. This was the text that the principal had in the storeroom. Of course there weren't enough copies for the kids to take home. If any of you listeners out there ever taught English in the '50s or '60s or '70s you'll remember Michael West as the guy, the Britisher, who made millions publishing through Longman's, producing Shakespeare readers for use with Pashtuns or to Hmong mountain people in Southeast Asia and so forth. In our case, we taught *Midsummer Night's Dream*.

We tried to make pattern drills out of the dialogue. There is a quirk in the Laghmani dialect of Pushtu. There is no distinction in pronunciation between the "f" and the "p." For example, in their dialect their language was either, 'Fashtu' or 'Pashtu.' They made no linguistic difference, phonemic difference, between the two.

So we were teaching Michael West's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, in which one of the main characters is named Puck, who turned out to be alternately 'F___' and 'Puck' causing Joe and me no end of mirth. But in any case, teaching and living circumstances were very, very primitive. But the valley was peaceful. It was a poet's paradise of lush green fields running to low hills east and west and the high snowy peaks of Nuristan to the north. The village of Tigari consisted of a few lean-to shops. It was empty except on market day once a week. You would never have guessed what was in store for the country or for that province down the road a little over a decade later when the old order was destroyed. I'll talk about Kabul at a different time but Laghman was peaceful, and the people were hospitable. We were invited time and again, constantly invited, to people's homes. "Homes" does not nearly describe the living arrangements of the Afghans. With few exceptions, they lived in little clusters of hovels you might call villages where a weekly market would take place. Or a home was often literally a castle, a fortress that soldiers and civilian contractors in Afghanistan over the last 10 or 12 years will be very well acquainted with. In places like Laghman, most people didn't live in the villages, but in these fortresses where the extended social unit lived together, seemingly in independence from the outside world. I won't go into to the life of the women, since we never saw anything of them except when they brought the food that was set before us. We were constantly invited to these compounds for dinners or for festivities of one kind or another. Our friend Habib Khaliqi, the governor, would describe to us the family history of our hosts and their role in the community.

Q: What was- Did you find that, I mean were teachers appreciated in that society?

ALBIN: Joe and I were. We were very strange and exotic to everyone except Habib and Virginia. With the exception of our fellow teachers, the school principal and a couple of provincial officials, nobody knew what an American was, nobody knew where America was, nobody knew that the Earth was round, nobody knew anything about anything beyond the confines of their valley. Complete ignorance of the world. Why their kids were being taught English was beyond them. It was something that the government required. As I say, they were as hospitable as can be. We would be shopping in the village during the weekly market and people would greet us warmly, kids would crowd around us. The farmers would thrust things at us, freebies like vegetables, fruit and so forth. But they had no idea who we were or why we were there.

Q: Okay. You know, you sat around or listened to your- the Peace Corps superiors say what the hell were you doing? I mean in other words what were the kids who were getting English, what was that?

ALBIN: Damned if I know. At the end of our two year stint our group, Group Four, this was 1964-1966, was summoned a big room in Kabul at the front office for what is now called a focus group session or after action report. We were given a questionnaire to fill out. We were to detail all manner of things regarding our two-year experience. They said they wanted our honest answers. Well, some of the questions regarded the impact we had on the local community. I tell you, Stu, for that first year's experience, I had no way to answer those questions. I had no way to calculate our impact. First of all, there were no established metrics. We had nothing but our subjectivities. Joe Basille shared my view that our impact was nil, absolutely nil. I couldn't see how we had impacted even our students in class because they were deprived of tools for learning and encouragement. We couldn't assign homework, we couldn't do anything beyond make up pattern drills from the Michael West readers. You know, "This is a pen, "This is a book," kind of thing. There was no way to measure by tests or quizzes because they had no paper and no pencils. We'd just go around the asking the boys to "repeat after me." They'd sit out there in the open under the tree; every Afghan carries a piece of cloth, a kind of multipurpose cloth that they sling over their shoulders. Maybe you've seen pictures of them. In any case they'd throw this cloth on the ground and sit or squat it on it for 45 minutes or 50 minutes, whatever their class time was, and they'd stare at you slack jawed for the time and try their best to repeat some sentence from "Midsummer Night's Dream" involving F___ or Puck, alternately. So my impact was nil, and I said that honestly in our debrief. And when we compared notes, those of us who filled out this questionnaire later, we all said pretty much the same thing. When the report was finished and we were shown a draft, the Peace Corps officials declared that our effective reach extended to 100,000 people. In other words, that just so happened, coincidentally, to be the estimated population of Laghman province at the time. So we impacted, officially, 100,000 people. Well that's a number they probably got from the "Information Please" almanac. I remember answering the question about Kabul, where I spent my second year. I had a little more to say, but very little more, about my experience at Kabul University during the second year.

Q: Okay let's talk about Kabul University. You were brought back because of your loss of weight and all of that.

ALBIN: Yes, yes.

Q: What did they have you doing?

ALBIN: Well one of the things about the Middle East- Have you lived in the Middle East?

Q: Just Dhahran.

ALBIN: Dhahran. Well Dhahran is a different kettle of fish entirely.

Q: That's not a-

ALBIN: Yes.

Anyway. The Middle East, the Arab Middle East, the Afghan Middle East and the Iranian Middle East and the Turkish Middle East have a really unquestionable thirst for English. So there are never too many English teachers. When I was transferred to Kabul, I don't remember exactly what month it was; I remember it was warm weather so it was spring or summer of '65 let's say. The office had no trouble placing me. It was simply a matter of where they needed somebody. At that moment they needed somebody at the university, the faculty of engineering and the faculty of medicine at Kabul U. So for the next year I taught at those two faculties, where there were proper textbooks, English teaching materials, blackboards, proper classrooms, and *chalk*. Those of us who taught there could work in a normal environment.

Q: Well did you feel that your time in the province turned you into a teacher?

ALBIN: Yes and no. It helped teach me, for one thing, that I didn't want to be a teacher. It was not the only such experience but it led me to that decision.

Before I leave Laghman, talking about impact, there was a student there who was much older than the average. In fact, he wasn't an honest to God student at all. He was a kid who at that time must have been about 17 years old, or 18, something along those lines, whose family sent him to Laghman to convalesce after a terrible football accident. He had fallen on his arm, or somehow broken his arm, and the doctor had mis-set it and it was misshapen so never again would he have full use of his right hand. His family sent him to Germany for corrective surgery and he lost a lot of school time. His dad sent him to Laghman to make up the required grades. The weather down there was near tropical and the school was open when Kabul schools were closed. I guess his father had found out from the grapevine that there were a couple of Americans down there and they might tutor him in English. So Said (pronounced Saeed) Mohammed and the two of us, Joe and

I, sort of palled around together. He was officially a student in the school although he really wasn't a student, having already mastered the requirements in his Kabul schooling.

I can't remember where he lived. His family was not from Laghman province; in fact he didn't know any Pashtu. This was another reason why our relationship was friendly- because we didn't know any Pashtu either. So we palled around, we ate together, we joked around together and he helped us play football in the schoolyard with the kids of an afternoon and that sort of thing. In those days his hand was still in a cast. His English was very good, way above average. Because he was a good student, and because he had been a little bit traveled, and because he was a stranger he was quite exceptional for the population of Laghman. Eventually what happened was this: I had written back to my mother in Gary, telling her news of what I was doing, etcetera. I mentioned Said and his situation, and wouldn't it be nice if he could get a visa and have an American doctor look at his damaged arm. My Mom, through one facility or another, pulled strings through church, through the bishop's office in Gary perhaps, I don't know for sure, expedited a visa to come to the States, where he eventually settled and received citizenship. He got to the U.S. at about age 19. He and I are still in touch. He married an American girl, has a couple of kids who are grown now and in college or maybe out of college and has become an upstanding citizen. He's a successful Mercedes salesman in Crown Point, Indiana. I'm proud of him. He didn't have anything when he came here. Mom helped him out with a free room to stay and he just worked earned an American high school diploma, got his college diploma and found himself a job that he stayed with for his entire working life. As far as I know he's still working for them. He's probably just about my age now. I talked to him not too long ago, still married, happily married and has, as I say a nice family. I visited them about three or four years ago. They were living in Crown Point, Indiana, a nice middle class family.

Anyway, that was the impact I had in Laghman province; one young Afghan, one visa, one new American citizen.

Q: Alright. Okay, Kabul. What was Kabul like when you got there? I mean, was this a big city or-?

ALBIN: They say its population is now four million. I don't know; I guess that's what the CIA *Fact Book* says. When I was there it was 400 thousand and it was a beautiful city to live in and to have fun in. I had a house with three other Peace Corps guys -- in a nice part of town called Shahr-E-Naw. We partied a lot; we had a wonderful time with other Peace Corps volunteers, with upper class Afghans, with homemade wine and beer, with lots of Beatles and parties of a weekend. I don't know whether this would mean anything to you but it might to some. We would party on weekends, if not at our place or at another Peace Corps house, then with Louie and Nancy Dupree, the famous anthropologists who studied Afghanistan for decades. Louie's widow, Nancy, is founder and director of the Afghan Research Center at Kabul University. She's in her 80s and the guiding spirit of the enterprise. A wonderful woman.

In any case, we would work, sleep, and travel around the country -- that is when I wasn't in the bathroom with dysentery, because it never left me. Fortunately it was not the kind of dysentery that invades your body and pollutes you for the rest of your life. It was another kind of dysentery that hurts only for a little while. From the day I left Afghanistan and for the next 20 years or so in the Middle East I never had a sick day. After Afghanistan, I was in some pretty crummy places but I never got tummy sick. Never again. Never had the revenge, anybody's revenge.

Q: Well okay. Well let's talk about your- In the first place, how did you find sort of being close to administrative headquarters of the Peace Corps in Afghanistan?

ALBIN: Nice people. How administratively adept they were I have no idea and wasn't the least bit interested in what kind of shop they ran. But they were very nice people. The director in those days was Robert Steiner, who's probably still alive in his 90s; he and his wife and family lived in Kabul. I didn't socialize with them much but it seems to me no one could have been more appropriate for the job. He loved his work, he loved the Afghans, and he loved us. I saw him a couple of years ago at a fundraiser; he lives in New England. It was a nice little reunion.

Q: Alright well let's see. You're teaching at the university; what were your students like and how did you find teaching there?

ALBIN: Easy compared to Laghman. It was a delight. And what did I learn there as far as teaching was concerned? I learned that teaching could be efficient and rewarding but I also learned that it was not for me, that that career was not for me. As I say, we were well supplied with all we needed. I would ride my bike to work, to and fro; it was quite a long ride, pretty awful in the wintertime because Kabul is cold, snowy, and muddy in the winter, so I might take a taxi or get a ride with somebody going in my direction. We lived in Shahr-E-Naw, a prosperous part of town with a lot of foreigners so somebody was always going across town and I could get rides and a taxi back home. My circle of friends in Kabul was very, very wide. I knew Afghans, Afghan teaching colleagues, Afghan government officials, all of them middle to upper class. It was very different from the rural setting of that first year. It was very entertaining and instructive.

Q: Where were the students- what was the outlook for the students there?

ALBIN: I would say in those days, we're talking '65 now, '65 and '66 and '67 the outlook was optimistic. There was a good deal of political activity on campus. I felt as if for the first time in my life I was at the center of political dynamism. At first it was disorienting. I didn't know what to call the various factions. Many of us were beginning- most of us were young people- were beginning to be politically aware. In my case, as I've described, I was not particularly interested up until then in politics, but I enjoyed learning who the factions were, who the shakers were, who the leftists were, and who the rightists were. Afghanistan had a new constitution in those days that was sponsored by the king, Zahir Shah. There was a parliament. I suppose it was a semi-democratic country, a

guided democracy, which had ratified a constitution at a constitutional convention, Loya Jirga (grand assembly of elders) or maybe by the parliament, I don't remember exactly. I think it's correct to say that it was the first such fundamental law. It was a momentous document which many still admire. I still have an English-language copy in my library. There were political parties; political factions left and right. Not Islamist by the way. Not such Islamists as we saw later and see now. This is one of the critical things about Middle Eastern developments that only people of my generation and your generation- would be conscious of, this business of Islamism as a political movement. Political Islam, it's called. I'm in the midst of a hot Internet and email exchange with a group of academics and retired diplomats on the use of the term "Islamic" or "Islamist" as a pejorative. In those days the terms were not in use. Afghans as a whole were conservative believers, going about their rituals quietly. They were background landscape, like the hills and mountains.

One angle of view is that unless you have grown up, as I have, watching the transition from inside Middle East, I include Afghanistan in this, you miss the transition from a Middle East that was headed in an optimistic, secular, Westernized, developmental direction to an area of anger, instability, economic stagnation, illiteracy, and religious extremism. You might not understand what the civilizational shift to Islamism, to Muslim Brotherhoodism, was like. You don't understand that around 1980, to use round numbers, and I'll talk about this later in my recollections, around 1980 something big happened in the Middle East that was perceptible, at least in the parts of the Middle East that I was living in. There was the Khomeini revolution, of course, in '79, but what we see now is broader and deeper than that. Something new had developed, something that didn't exist in 1965 and that something was Islamism. Well, you asked me about the views of or the atmosphere at Kabul University in those days. The atmosphere was politically active, I won't say "politically charged" but politically active, but Islamism or the Islamic tendency as we see it today did not exist on campus. You had the leftists, you had the communists, you had Parcham and Khalq and those parties that were associated with the Russian invasion of 10 years later, almost 15 years later, which were just developing. In fact, one of my most distinct recollections was hanging out with a group of mixed Americans and Afghan students. We followed crowds from the university to watch what I think was one of the first demonstrations against the prime minister. It was my first demonstration, the first time I had ever taken part in a demonstration, except for a small one at Notre Dame where, walking across campus, I was overtaken by a noisy crowd protesting something Ted Hesburgh, the university president, had done. I could go back to my notes and clear up some details about Kabul in 1965. That day, students in large numbers marched on the prime minister's residence, or some politician's residence; I don't recall. May even have been up to the parliament.

In any case, the Afghan army lined up in phalanx to block the crowd. They sported helmets, and batons. They were on one side of a wall and the students were on the other side. My companions and I were on the protesters' side of the barrier. Some were shooting at the cops, at the police or the army, the army, I think it was. The army shot back with bullets and tear gas. Several people died that day. Hostility between the students and the government increased. If I recall, protests continued and classes were

cancelled from time to time. As I recall protests persisted until I left the country in the summer of 1966 and I lost track of political events. I remember being on the wall with my colleagues or my companions and listening to the gunfire and the bullets whistle over our heads and I said to myself, I recall this very distinctly, "Mike, you're out of your mind to be here." But I stayed; I remember dispersing with the crowds later. I don't remember whether it was the tear gas that drove us away or whether the steam had simply gone out of the protest. I don't remember how it ended but I remember very vividly that particular incident.

The incident may have led to the downfall of Prime Minister Mohammad Yusuf, I'm not sure. I'll have to go back to my notes or to Ambassador Peter Tomsen's most excellent book on the political history of the country, *The Wars of Afghanistan*. That was my first exposure to serious political protest; it was at Kabul U in about 1965.

Q: How did you find the students? Were they engaged? Did they see that this was taking them somewhere, this study-?

ALBIN: Yes. To get back to your question, yes. I would say the atmosphere generally at that stage of Afghan history was very optimistic. The kids in the medical school and the engineering school were of course the crème de la crème of Afghan youth. They were the ones with the highest baccalaureate scores, they were the ones with the best future prospects, they were the ones that came from- generally they came from good families, who might already have had the opportunity, or would soon have opportunity, to study abroad. Fellowships or scholarships would be offered by the Americans, Germans, French, British, all of whom would be offering graduate schools, professional exchanges, and the like. So their prospects were extremely good. They were at the same time restless, as I had not been restless as an undergraduate. I described to you my life of fun and frolic in undergraduate days. Well, at Kabul U I recall a generally studious atmosphere in class with an undertone of political involvement in more informal conversation. There was a lot of restlessness, I believe. There was another kind of student. As is common in the Middle East there was the "Gucci Class," with the fancy clothes, girls pushing the limits of dress, and boys who were swells and fops.

Q: Were the classes mixed?

ALBIN: No, I don't think they were in 1965-'66, although I could be wrong. I remember the girls on the campus in their dark smocks and white scarves, head scarves. I'm not talking about the Afghan chador; I'm talking about a feminine kind of scarf. I don't recall having girls in my classes.

Q: Was there much interest in the United States?

ALBIN: Oh, everybody wanted English and everybody wanted to come to the U.S. They wanted anything American they could get their hands on, clothes, Coca-Cola, cigarettes, anything Western in general and American in the specific. By the way, that has not changed over the decades for the Middle East in general, it seems to me.

Q: Well then where were the students going once they graduated? I mean were many going to schools in England or the United States?

ALBIN: You know, when I left Kabul in August '66, with the exception of a short return stay in the summer of '67, I lost all contact with Afghanistan because in those days there was no Internet. I couldn't punch up Afghan news on Google or any such service, so getting news from Kabul to Baghdad, where I wound up in '66, was impossible.

So where did the students wind up? I must say, to my regret, that I did not have any close student or faculty friends at Kabul U, so I didn't keep up by correspondence. I think one of the reasons for this was that I lived across town. Most of the students lived in dorms or in areas close to the university. Although the main roads in the city were paved it was still a long bicycle commute from one side of town to the other. The faculty, with whom I could have socialized, were also scattered around town. My housemates belonged to different professions. They were physical education teachers or mechanics of some kind, so we didn't really cross paths professionally with their colleagues. My roommates were all my age but they weren't associated with the university so none of us had common Afghan acquaintances. And I was invited from time to time but never often enough to develop a close friendship with any of my faculty colleagues. For another thing, they were older than I was. There is an age thing that separates people in Afghanistan. It can be as strong as class or ethnicity.

Q: Okay. Well then this is a good place to stop.

ALBIN: All right, okay.

Q: And we'll pick this up the next time in 1966? Summer of '66?

ALBIN: We will leave Kabul in the summer of '66, yes. I have a couple of things to say about Kabul before we leave it but-

Q: And you just sort of make note of that.

ALBIN: Yes.

Q: Great.

Today is the 25th of April, 2013, with Michael Albin. And Mike, you had some more to talk about your Peace Corps time.

ALBIN: Yes. I don't know whether you've recorded Peace Corps volunteers or Peace Corps staff.

Q: We do and we try to get as much of the Peace Corps experience as we can.

ALBIN: I see, all right. Well I think I described last time my year in Laghman and the difficulties with the teaching, difficulties with the health. I described my association with the provincial governor and his wife.

After moving to Kabul, where I taught at the university for the second year of my tour, and I lived in a house with three other Peace Corps volunteer guys, life was relaxed in Kabul and rewarding from a professional teaching standpoint. But as I mentioned last time it was rewarding in the sense I realized that I didn't want to be a teacher for the rest of my life.

Q: Why not?

ALBIN: I don't know exactly. Now that I'm retired and unemployed, teaching doesn't look so bad and I have taught on and off since then as I'll get to later when I talk about my first experience in Iraq, in Baghdad, because I did spend some years teaching English in Baghdad. But in Kabul maybe it was the circumstances at Kabul U, which I described last time as being fairly comfortable, fairly well organized, well supplied with teaching material and the students in the engineering and medical faculties were motivated and did their homework and were the top tier of the Afghan youth as they proceeded on to higher studies. So that was rewarding but as far as teaching as a career is concerned it wasn't exactly that it was too much work; I simply didn't feel comfortable in the classroom teaching the basics of English. It wasn't fun and I didn't know what in my life would be fun but I figured it wasn't going to be teaching English as a foreign language, TEFL. And that's not to say I didn't enjoy my time at the university; I did. I enjoyed the second year in Kabul because I felt a little bit better health-wise. I wasn't entirely disabled by dysentery. I did a good deal of travel. There's not a corner and a crevice or crack of Afghanistan that I didn't visit during that year, that second year, except maybe the Wakhan Corridor way up there, jutting into China. That area was off limits to us.

Q: Was that sort of off limits?

ALBIN: It was a military area.

Let me tell you for just a second about the Peace Corps in relation to the Afghan government. The early days of the Kennedy Administration were feel-good days between the Afghan government and the U.S. Government. There was a lot of enthusiasm among my colleagues, my fellow PCVs (Peace Corps Volunteers); there was a lot of enthusiasm at the embassy, at least on the surface. There was no stress or strife that I could discern between the Peace Corps office and the core embassy people -- not that I had a lot of association with Embassy personnel, just slight social interaction with them but nothing really official. As I say it was feel-good times. USAID (United States Agency for International Development) was heavily involved in Afghanistan in those days. You'll recall the Helmand Valley Project, an immense public works project down in the Helmand Valley. There was also the modern Kandahar International Airport. That useless facility was completed just before I got to Afghanistan. The southern part of the Ring Road around the country that was built by USAID and the northern part was built by the

Russians, so we sort of circumscribed Afghanistan with our various development programs.

The AID mission in Kabul in those days was huge. Some of its facilities were a refuge of sorts for PCVs deprived of access to the commissary. We could go into the compound to buy simple things like catsup and American cigarettes. This was my formative association with AID and I came to observe that outfit over the years, deriving an intense distrust and dislike of USAID, especially as it morphed from hands-on development into fund administration, doling out millions to so-called underdeveloped countries. And as USAID got more out of hands-on development and more into contract administration I grew less and less admiring of the agency.

Q: What was the difference between contract administration and regular projects?

ALBIN: Let me give you an example. Thank you for asking that because AID in my view should be a bunch of people committed to development of Afghanistan or Peru or Thailand or wherever they are with hands-on commitment, hands on ugly American commitment to the development of the country they're assigned to. Well, in those days smallish projects- and I'll give you an example from my experience in Laghman, my first year. There was a farm family, the Youngs from Iowa. Mr. Young was an agriculture specialist- an agronomist. He was assigned to construct and advise on the work of an agricultural experiment station in Jalalabad. His wife and a couple of kids lived with him. Their home was in the city. Whenever I had the chance I would ride many miles along the rutted, pitted road along the river down to Jalalabad and camp out for the weekend with the family who were always very welcoming. I would have bacon and eggs for breakfast and tomatoes off of the experimental farms and other fresh vegetables. I'd load up my bike and my backpack and trundle all that stuff back to our shack and to the Khaliqis.

The Youngs lived in Jalalabad by themselves. There was no USAID compound, no fully staffed office with the latest office machinery. Mr. Young worked at the experimental station which was associated with the Ministry of Agriculture. He dedicated two, three, or four years' service to the development of grain or vegetables, or livestock; whatever he was assigned to do. He loved his work and was very close to his Afghan colleagues. He was optimistic about the future. His wife and kids loved being there. They were home schooled, using a course, Calvert I think it was, that was used overseas at this time.

The Youngs were wonderful exemplars of what AID should be, not exactly Peace Corps, not exactly diplomatic, but somewhere in between. People who were lived with the people and loved the job they were doing.

Now take the other kind of USAID found simultaneously in the country. I never lived in the Helmand Valley so I don't have firsthand experience with the huge, billion dollar expenditure called the Helmand Valley Project, brilliantly described in Rajiv Chandrasekaran's *Little America*. The author paints a picture of the American colony established to house, feed, school and entertain the corps of American AID workers and

contractors in compounds of watered lawns and the tract housing, paved roads, and commissaries all within a compound where the engineers and agronomists, teachers and all the rest of those people lived in isolation from the Afghans. That's the kind of AID that co-existed with the family in Jalalabad. Two kinds of projects and two kinds of personnel. I was a Peace Corps volunteer after all and my view of what we ought to be doing in the country differed markedly from what AID folk living in "Little America" thought they should be doing. I've known dozens of AID people and continue to have very close friendships with many of them. We differ on many, many policy and program matters but we remain friendly disputants. Those people in "Little America" were shielded from the Helmand Valley farmers that they were there to help with their irrigation projects, cropping projects and poppy replacement projects. Did they really participate in Afghanistan? As the agency evolved, the personnel grew even farther from the host environment, to the point that today USAID works through NGOs (non-governmental organizations), IOs (international organizations) and large non-profits as financiers and administrators with head offices in the Reagan Building or walled up in Green Zones and other protected facilities.

Later on, much later in my career when I got to Cairo, I found a gigantic USAID mission, housed in a skyscraper in the center of town. It had a budget of several hundred million dollars. The mission was conspicuous not only by the size of its purse and its physical presence but also by the ubiquity of its reach into the country's government, from the Ministry of Justice to the Ministry of Agriculture, it was all over the place, everywhere. By that time they had evolved, in my view, to an extremely bureaucratic, extremely wasteful outfit. The programs AID administered were political, for which there was no excuse other than the exigencies of balance between our commitment to Israel and the Peace Process. USAID served political ends, nothing more. I will argue that point to this day as I argued with Don Brown, the AID director in those days, as I argued with the USAID auditors. I said you guys are wasting your money, wasting my money. What you should be doing, if you want to help the Egyptians, the real Egyptians, is put bundles of dollar bills in helicopters and fly up and down the Nile throwing the money out the door. That gets the money into the hands of the fellaheen, the farmers and the peasants, and do the same over Helwan and Shubra to the factory workers. Well, they laughed; Albin doesn't know what he's talking about. Time has shown that I was right. Nowadays there is a growing preference for what's called cash transfer. Something akin to throwing money out of that helicopter, the Albin approach I mentioned. As we've learned over the years foreign aid is useful only as a short-term political tool, just one of many implements in the tool-box of foreign relations and diplomacy. In the long run it has been wasteful, counterproductive, and often corrupt. One of the reasons is that we don't have the kinds of people overseas that we need, people who are, as I say, halfway between diplomats and Peace Corps volunteers.

*Q: Yes. Let me stop for just a minute.
Okay.*

ALBIN: I was talking- I remember vividly one time- are we ready?

Q: Yes.

ALBIN: I remember vividly one time in Cairo I was having lunch at the embassy snack bar with the head AID auditor who was there on TDY (temporary duty) from Washington. He showed me a big, four color brochure, multi-page, eight or ten page brochure of AID's projects in Egypt and each page was filled with photographs of smiling mothers, smiling babies, smiling farmers, smiling workers, smiling elders. I said to him if everybody in Egypt is so DAMN happy why do they need USAID? If everybody is having such a good time and looking so prosperous why do they need AID? Well of course it's a political program, it was in those days, and everybody knew it was a political program.

On the other hand, to be fair to the people who were stationed there as specialists in their trade, I felt it was never necessary for an American ever to apologize to an Afghan or Egyptian for the prosperity of the United States. There were degrees of conspicuous consumption vis-à-vis the locals riding their donkeys or with their shabby clothes or walking barefoot through mud and snow. If you wanted to really be conspicuous you could drive your big Ford or Chevy station wagon, as big as a dreadnaught, down the narrow streets in Kabul or Cairo and be conspicuous. But common sense dictated that you didn't do that. It had nothing to do in those days with security; it had to do with image, with presentation, with a proper respect for the conditions of the local people. To minimize conspicuous consumption should have been a common sense requirement for AID employees, which they often violated in practice.

Q: Of course you're, in a way you're two different cultures--the Peace Corps volunteer and the AID person. I mean, the farmer who goes out, that's fine. I mean they were doing their thing. But the sewage construction person is not motivated in the same way. I mean they're out to produce a sewer and the best damn sewer that you possibly can, need all the technical equipment and all that and to get that person you have to appeal to them by housing conditions and- I mean it's a different caste and a Peace Corps volunteer will always look upon these people as, I mean you know, I mean-

ALBIN: Right, Stu.

Q: -I mean there's two different worlds and you know, I mean, you know the Peace Corps volunteers, you know you don't get it, you don't live with the people and all and to the sewage engineers a bunch of these are a bunch of wild kids going out and they're teaching people to speak English or-

ALBIN: They're digging potties; they're showing them how to dig outhouses and latrines.

Q: Yes. I mean it's ridiculous. But you're on to something too, though, that these projects are often ill conceived, overdone-

ALBIN: Yes. That was my next point.

Q: Now that's the real problem.

ALBIN: Over and above the personal creature comforts that the AID employee enjoys is the, as you say, overbuilding, overdesign, and the disregard for local conditions. Let's jump forward a moment, to the Cairo days. One of the earliest projects after Sadat's change of heart towards Israel and Camp David peace, one of the first handshake projects was the supply of Ward buses to augment the Cairo public transport fleet. The Ward buses were school buses exactly like the ones we see in our communities. I mean stateside school buses. AID purchased a lot of them on the cheap and inserted them onto Cairo streets. What happened was, they not only broke down in Cairo conditions, dust and grime, they weren't engineered for Cairo's gas and oil, or for careless maintenance. Worst of all was that they were noisy. The engines were as loud as a machine shop as they ground through the gears. And as these things roared through neighborhoods, up and down streets in poor neighborhoods, and all over town, they would growl and roar to the point where the Egyptians couldn't stand the noise. I remember the ambassador having to publicly apologize for the buses and AID or somebody, the transportation ministry in Cairo, took them off the streets and junked them. That's just one example of inappropriate technologies introduced by American bureaucrats.

Q: Well let's move on. Is there anything else we should talk about in-

ALBIN: In Peace Corps?

Q: How'd you feel when you left Afghanistan? Whither Afghanistan and whither our impact at that time?

ALBIN: I think I described to you last time that the Peace Corps sat us all down in a room to give us a questionnaire about the extent of our impact. It turned out that we impacted ranging up to 100,000 people. Well that was baloney, so much nonsense. We had a small visible impact; that is to say people could see two white people, teachers, on the school grounds or riding our bikes up and down the road. Perhaps we 'impacted' our students or our fellow faculty members at the small school, maybe we impacted some of the provincial employees and people in the village down the road. And that was all the impact we had. We didn't have access to a car and unless the governor and his family went out on a picnic up the river we didn't move beyond a few miles of our home so we had no widespread impact. The claims that Peace Corps had widespread influence on the community were exaggerated. I've never looked into the Peace Corps archives; I don't know what they claimed. But in Kabul foreigners were common, AID was there in force, so were the Russians, and the UN had a big presence. So foreigners were conspicuous. I don't think Afghans in general differentiated between a Peace Corps volunteer teacher and a Fulbright teacher, for example, or between a Peace Corps nurse and a CARE nurse.

Summing up the PC experience, I'd say I learned to love the international life. I learned that I didn't enjoy teaching. And I learned that in order to position myself for work

overseas I had better concentrate on learning a language or two and get a graduate degree. Finally, I came away with a lifelong affection for Afghanistan.

Q: Okay. Well then where'd you- when did you leave and where did you go?

ALBIN: I left Kabul in the summer of 1966. The Peace Corps published a newsletter. I saw a job opening in Baghdad for an English teacher, a TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) teacher, so I sent a letter of application off to the people in Baghdad and I was accepted as an English teacher at someplace called Baghdad College, which I'll get to in just a minute.

I arrived in Baghdad in the summer of 1966 for what turned out to be a three-year teaching contract in Iraq. So that's how I got the job. My qualifications were two years of TEFL experience, and I was willing to live in Iraq. I was a pretty good TEFL teacher, hard-working and well-organized if I say so myself. I received recommendations from director Bob Steiner and the senior TEFL consultant in the Kabul office. In those days not many people had ever heard of Baghdad or wanted to go there so I may have been the only applicant. I got off the plane that day at the Baghdad airport. I remember it was high summer, and I walked in to the broiling Baghdad heat. As I walked across the tarmac to the terminal I was tempted to buy a ticket out as soon as I could. I'd never been so hot in my life as when I walked down the stairs of that plane. I thought I had climbed into the jet engines. Actually, I was simply in the great outdoors in summertime Baghdad. Since that time I've spent many summers in Iraq and have grown to love the heat of summer and hate the cold dampness of winter. If it's not at least 100 degrees, I wear a sweater.

I started work almost immediately. Let me take a second to describe this remarkable institution. Baghdad College was a prep school, first grade through twelfth grade. It was the elite school of Iraq. Many of the men who have led Iraq since the 1930s have either graduated from there or attended at one time or another. Their sons have graduated from there. They have professional leadership positions all over the world. It was operated in those days by American Jesuits from the Boston area. They were all Bostonians associated with Holy Cross or Boston College. The school was founded in the mid-1930s by a brave Jesuit named Edward Madaras, practically the only non-Irish name you'd ever find in the records of Baghdad College. There were one or two priests of Polish or Hungarian extraction. But the faculty were mostly McCarthys and McCartys and Sullivans and Donahues. The teaching faculty numbered perhaps two dozen with a similar number of Iraqi teachers. The school followed the Iraqi Ministry of Education course of study, except that the entire curriculum was in English. It was the country's elite school, as I say. Not long before I got there in '66, the same New England province of Jesuits agreed to open a university. It was called Al-Hikma University. I was never officially associated with it and because it was clear across town I never spent a lot of time there. Al-Hikma had its own faculty and administration. Its faculty, American and Iraqi, had the advanced degrees required of university professors.

So Al-Hikma drew students who excelled in English. It provided an alternative to the universities of Baghdad, Basra and Mosul. I could say a few words about Iraqi education at this time, but I'll try to stick to Baghdad College.

Baghdad College recruited me for two reasons. One, to teach English in the school itself. So at one time or another during my three years at the school I taught everything from first grade to twelfth. The other reason I was hired was because the school had received a grant from the Ford Foundation to redesign English teaching in Iraq. In addition to teaching in the daytime school I taught the teacher retraining courses at the Ministry of Education. The teachers were selected by the ministry. They attended evening classes two or three times a week taught by my senior associate and me. We covered modern techniques in TEFL with practice teaching sessions, how to set up and operate a language lab, fundamentals of linguistics, and differences between British and American English. The objective was to move instruction away from the Michael West approach they had traditionally used in Iraqi schools. We were building a cadre of high school teachers and English teaching supervisors in the ministry. That project started a year or so before I got to Baghdad. They recruited me to assist the person who arranged for the grant. So I worked on that Ford project as instructor, curriculum consultant, and office boy during the next three years. I left the country in 1969 as did all Americans. I will get to that later.

Both teaching in the school and the teaching in the evening classes were extremely rewarding, a lot of fun. I enjoyed it very much. I grew accustomed to lecturing and teaching. I somehow overcame the hesitancy that I had felt as a young man in speaking before audiences.

The Ford Foundation project manager was a Jesuit, a faculty member, Robert Sullivan, S.J. He headed the English department at Baghdad College and was the official head of the Ford program. The actual doer, the guy who actually made the program work was a Lebanese-American by the name of Camille Tebsherany, a name known to a lot of State Department people and others in the Middle East because of his long career in Beirut, Damascus, and Baghdad. Teb was his nickname. He and I worked day and night to prepare textbooks for the Ford classes. We used much the same material for revamping the English curriculum at Baghdad College. We were busy 'round the clock; we were either teaching or working on the new English curriculum for the school's twelve grades.

Q: Well I mean, it wasn't- I mean you were basically more working for the ministry of education and-

ALBIN: I actually had two assignments; I had the Ford Foundation contract and the Baghdad College contract. Fr. Sullivan, S.J. was the overall supervisor of both, and Teb was the project director. I was not an employee of the education ministry.

The stipend that I was paid was very low, around the same as the Peace Corps. It was a living stipend rather than a salary. The treasurer of the school was a guy named Thomas Kelly, S.J. Father Kelly was treasurer and a teacher too, because everyone had at least two jobs. Fr. Kelly was typical of most of the American Jesuits. He'd been in Iraq many

years but didn't know any Arabic. He and others helped create the atmosphere of a completely American institution. Every two weeks he'd hand me my pay in Iraqi dinars. One morning early before class I went to his office to collect my stipend. He was just getting to work. He walked to a series of very tall windows and threw open the curtains. Looking up at the clear blue sky he said in exasperation. "Well, it looks like another goddam sunny day!"

Most of the campus buildings were designed by Edward Madaras, S. J. the school's founder. He designed them to stay cool in Baghdad's dry and scorching temperatures. They were ventilated by means of tunnels that trapped and directed cool air from the desert coolers underground through vents in the hallways, classrooms and labs. Many of the buildings had tall windows, maybe six or eight feet high.

These buildings still exist. Today, the College remains the country's elite school but the Americans are long gone. We were kicked out by Saddam at the end of the school year in 1969. The campus and buildings were all the work Father Madaras himself. He must have been brilliant guy. He did everything -- from designing the buildings to designing the curriculum, to teaching, and doing the broken field running through the Iraqi bureaucracy. His reputation is huge and long-lasting. I never met him; he had died by the time I got there. By the way, for an amusing read on the school by Fr. Madaras himself, pick up *Al-Baghdadi, Tales Told by the Tigris*.

I have another memory of Father Kelly. I read in the newspaper one day -- in English because I didn't have any Arabic in those days -- that Iraq had raised its income tax. I went into Kelly's office on payday, opened my pay envelope to find the amount was the same as before. I was paid in dollars. That was a big advantage because I could take those dollars to the black market and get a better price than the official rate at banks. That's how it worked. I asked Father Kelly when the new tax was going to be deducted. He said, "It's not; you will not pay new income tax." I asked, "Why not. Are you cheating on taxes?" And he said that he was not cheating at all, simply doing no more than getting some of his own back. He went on to explain that during the past academic year the school needed new equipment for the physics lab. The equipment was ordered and shipped from the U.S. The school had obtained a waiver of customs duties from the Ministry of Education. He had all the signatures and official stamps waiving the duties because the material was going to be used for education. Well, when the ship arrived in Basra with the cargo of equipment the customs people slapped a 100% duty on it. There was no way to wiggle out of paying, and of course paying a bribe was out of the question, so the school coughed up the money. "You're probably not acquainted with this, Mike," Kelly said. "There is a principle in canon law called 'occult compensation.' That is how I can I reimburse the College for being cheated by the government." Pretty clever, I thought.

Q: What was the government of Iraq when you arrived there?

ALBIN: Yes, Abd al-Karim Qasim was dead by that time. During my time in Baghdad there was a series of coups and upheavals in the north and south of the country. One after another Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr and the two Arif brothers held top posts. The Baathis and Communists were fighting each other. Iraq became a banana republic during this period, with coups, assassinations, and insurrections. In 1968 came the coup to end all coups, bringing Saddam Hussein and the Baath to power for good. Al-Bakr was made president, but Saddam ran the country from his Party and vice-presidential position. I'll not go into details here. Al-Bakr was more than a figurehead but less powerful than Saddam, who was the real leader. After we Americans left, Saddam removed al-Bakr from office and took complete control of the country. But those details are neither here nor there as far as the school was concerned. What's important is that all of us Americans knew that we would have to leave the country by the end of academic year 1968-69.

What happened was that in '66 and '67, Baghdad was enjoying the end of its monarchical golden age, culturally speaking. Games played by the top political leadership didn't affect us. The city was open to me, the city was open to everybody; you could go anyplace, say anything, do anything, socialize with anybody. I had tons of Iraqi friends. As you can imagine, as a teacher I was invited all the time to the homes of students. Teaching colleagues invited me to their homes or to evenings on Abu Nawas Street on the Tigris, where we would feast on masgouf (barbequed fish), beer and arak. Parents would wine and dine me and other Iraqi lay teachers. The Jesuits were often invited too. The Iraqi upper classes would entertain us and we had perfect access around the city, and around the country for that matter. I visited a lot of places in the north, the south, that nowadays people only dream about. I visited the Marshes, Mosul and the northern provinces, the west; everywhere. Wonderful days. The Baathis took over for good in the summer of 1968 and everything changed. Immediately, my phones were tapped; I was followed everywhere I went on my bike or on the bus by a plainclothes guy. The invitations to personal homes for dinner, to the Alwiyah Club, to picnics, movies or art galleries stopped immediately too because it was dangerous for Iraqis to socialize with foreigners. My circle of social contacts diminished to just two or three families, most notably a couple of teachers who were on the faculty and were already tainted by association with Baghdad College, and a couple of student families. All the rest- with good reason- just didn't invite us anymore.

It was perhaps at that time, although I don't remember about this Stu, that the U.S. embassy was shut. Or maybe the U.S. embassy was shut in '69.

Q: Yes, I'm not sure.

ALBIN: Yes. I won't go there right now because I'm not really sure. Unlike the Peace Corps experience we at Baghdad College, had no contact with the U.S. embassy whatever. Any embassy business that had to be transacted by the College or Al-Hikma University, was carried out by the school principal, the Jesuit community superior, or university administrator. Nobody else was authorized to go near the embassy, so we were a self-contained unit at Baghdad College. I didn't mind because if there were visa things to do I'd go to the consular section; but those were rare occasions. We had no status as

U.S. Government employees so I had no access to the embassy, to the commissary or snack bar if there was one. We were all on our own. In those days Baghdad was safe and was, as I've described, a friendly city, lots to see, lots to do; there was no reason to go to the embassy. I don't even recall going to a Fourth of July party. We were in a different part of town, a lovely part of town. In 1990, I returned to Baghdad for the first time after many years, as a Fulbright researcher. It was wonderful to see old Iraqi friends. I had friends at the embassy too by that time. The PAO (Public Affairs Officer) was Jim Callahan. Jim and I were buddies from our teaching days at the College. He's now retired, like me. He and I made a visit to the old campus in Sulaykh. The school is still there and apparently thriving under Iraqi administration. It's still an elite school with an English language curriculum. Just recently here in Washington I met a graduate of Baghdad College – class of '88, I think he told me.

We met the principal and some of the faculty and visited the cemetery where a few of the Jesuits are buried. We went into the church. We were told that the church now belonged to the Chaldean patriarchate, the Iraqi Uniate denomination. In 1990, the seminary was still in operation. Apparently the church and seminary are administratively separate from the College. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

Life in Baghdad was very busy culturally. I enjoyed arts and creativity of Baghdad in those days. Baghdad today remains, as it was during the king's time, a very vital city culturally. I was always riding my bike or taking the bus downtown to gallery openings. I bought a great many paintings, I attended plays on many a weekend, although my Arabic was almost non-existent.

Q: Were you working on your Arabic?

ALBIN: Yes. I'll get to that. It was a vital city so there was never a dull moment in Baghdad. We were either working or we were socializing with Iraqis.

Q: Did you date?

ALBIN: That was the hardest thing about Baghdad. There was one girl, a nurse, an American girl, she was a nurse at a local hospital and she and I would pal around a lot. I don't remember her name.

Q: How about Iraqi girls?

ALBIN: No, no. No, no, no, no! Christian or Muslim, that was off limits. No, no, no.

I was not in a marrying mood in those days any more than I am now. The only reason Iraqi girls would want to go out with me or socialize was to eventually get married and settle in the US. Suppose for example I had a social life with Iraqi Christian girls, it would have been very different from socializing with the American nurse or any other American or British or European girls who might have been around town at the time. It

would have been highly circumscribed, chaperoned, and controlled by the parents. It would have been, for me, unthinkable.

Q: Yes well marriage was sort of the goal of any-

ALBIN: Yes.

Q:-of anything at that point. I mean, as far as Iraqis are concerned.

ALBIN: Marriage and the passport and eventual American citizenship was the goal and that's what daddy wanted and that's what she was coached to look out for.

Nowadays here in the Washington area the woods are full of such women. You're a consular officer; you know much more about this than I do. But this was common practice I think in those days and it certainly is today. I mean, I can tell you stories about the Iraqi community here. It happens here a lot. But to be fair, each woman, each family, has a different story. Some families are not as controlling as I describe.

Q: Well again, what was the government like? I mean how did you see the government at the time?

ALBIN: I- In Afghanistan I developed a kind of a real liking for local politics. It was a kind of hobby. I might be the only PCV who actually read the Afghan constitution of 1964, which I mentioned before. We discussed and argued politics with Afghans a lot. That is, when it was appropriate, when the circumstances were right and the interlocutor was appropriate we would talk a lot about politics with Afghans: Afghan students, Afghan faculty members, anybody who we thought was appropriate and safe. Afghanistan was not chock full of ministry of interior spies in those days. If it was it would surprise me. Yes, perhaps there were people listening, but it was a poor country and they had to spend their money on other things. So we could speak pretty openly and frankly.

In Baghdad in '66 and '67 and early '68, the situation was much the same. There was no reason not to develop an interest in and a knowledge of Iraqi politics. I knew who the players were, I read the English language newspaper, I listened to the BBC. Some of the top, more tuned-in Jesuits at the school were very well informed about Iraqi politics. The Jesuits at the al-Hikma really knew Iraqi politics because they were Arabists and were well accepted by the community. But those who were Arabists, Tom Campbell, John Donohue, Martin McDermott, for example, and one or two others, really knew what was going on. We would sit in the garden of the College having long dinners of a weekend and the table talk was often of politics. Our Iraqi faculty colleagues were often there and they would join in. Tebsherany, my colleague in the English department and my mentor, knew as much about Iraqi politics as the president of the republic. Such talk was educational and fun and open and free.

The crackdown came in July of 1968 when all conversation about politics with outsiders stopped, so any such talk was confined to the school campus with the Jesuits and the faculty members, that was all. No conversation outside. It was a terrible- terrible.

Q: Well with the faculty, with the genuine faculty, what was their- what were you getting from them about the view of our relations with Israel at that-

ALBIN: Ah. Good question. For those Jesuits who were politically aware -- many of the Jesuits were no different with regard to the local politics than the USAID personnel in Afghanistan, that is to say, indifferent. They were there to teach math, or biology and although they may have been there for 20 years and would end their working lives there, and be buried in the churchyard, they knew very little about Iraq beyond what the Christian community would share with them.

Anyway, those that paid attention to local politics were very conscious of the Israeli bias of the American government and how in their view that pro-Israeli inclination soured relations, not only with Iraq but the entire Arab world. Some of the priests were extremely vocal about that. Many of them kept their views to themselves. Father John Donohue, who was one of the leaders of the community, would discuss the issue, but he kept his views from the public. Other priests were much more vocally anti-Israel than Donohue was. I visited the Holy Land once or twice on bus trips with the Jesuits who wanted to show me and other lay faculty the sites. We saw and discussed both the Palestinian side and the Israeli side, but the focus of the trips was antiquarian and Biblical. We were in fact making a pilgrimage. We were not there to do politics or foreign affairs. In general, the attitude at the school was pretty pro-Arab, meaning pro-Palestinian.

Q: How aware were you at that time of the Sunni-Shia split?

ALBIN: There was no split at that time. An Iraqi was an Iraqi. I learned to identify some students and their families by their names or reputations, but the sectarian divide was not as cruelly prominent as it became during the '90s and in the mid-2000s. Of course I'm speaking of the class of people, mostly well-educated Baghdadis, who sent their sons to our school. There are many minorities in Iraq but we didn't associate with the most distant ones, like the Yazidis or Mandaeans, or even the Kurds. There is even a small population of Zoroastrians which I discovered in 2010 when I was in Iraq with the US Army. But that's a story for another time. We didn't have any contact with those minorities or with village people of any sect. As far as the main sects of Islam and the main Christian rites were concerned, they were all undifferentiated Iraqis; undifferentiated among themselves and to us. The Shi'ite and Sunni were no different in their differing theologies and traditions than the orthodox, Protestant or Uniate Christians. My bet is this: It would have caused more family trauma for a Chaldean Catholic to marry an Armenian Orthodox than for a Shia Muslim to marry a Sunni Muslim. This latter sort of mixed marriage happened all the time. Of course there were no Jews in those days; maybe a couple of Jewish families live in Iraq now. I don't know. That whole sad social tragedy happened way before my time.

Q: I want to stop-

ALBIN: I'll talk about the Christians for a minute.

My best friends in Baghdad in those days were Shia- especially after Saddam's reign of terror began in the second half of 1968. I'm still in contact with my student, who is now a physician in London. He came from a distinguished family of religious scholars in Najaf. It was through this family that I was able to meet some of the learned religious sheikhs when they visited the family in Baghdad and when I went along on trips to Najaf. I learned much about the sect, the theology, the historic and modern personalities, the folkloric traditions and family life. *Pater familias* was president of one of the big banks in Baghdad, before the government nationalized them. His bank was one of the last to be seized, if I recall correctly, so by the mid-'60s he was retired.

Q: Oh yes.

ALBIN: I don't know how old he was but maybe in his 60s or late 50s, something like that. He survived the early Baathi onslaught but eventually took his family into exile in Cairo where I reestablished contact later in my career.

His uncles, brothers, and cousins and so forth were all the learned legists and teachers, turbaned Shia Ulema (learned men) teaching in the Hawza, the Shia religious education system centered in Najaf. They were theologians, philosophers, writers, judges, that sort of thing. His household guests ranged from traditional sheikhs to international businessmen. It was a cosmopolitan, stimulating atmosphere in which I was always welcome as the teacher of the eldest son. When you come to think of it he's probably not much younger than I am because when I was teaching he was in my 11th and 12th grade classes. His younger brother is a doctor in North Carolina. And his sister, where did she wind up? In Canada someplace, I think. So the three kids made their lives outside Iraq. A very commonplace trajectory.

As far as the Arabic language is concerned, when I left Afghanistan and came to Iraq I had a decision to make right away. Any student of Arabic has to decide right off the bat whether to concentrate on the Arabic as it was spoken in the street or Arabic as a classical, literary language. The twain don't meet, at least pedagogically. And so I made a mistake early on; I decided to learn the street language, the local, everyday language. And in order to do so I had to design my own course because colloquial Arabic, no matter what kind of colloquial Arabic, whether it's Moroccan or Egyptian or Iraqi, was not taught; there were no textbooks for dialects and no really useful dictionaries beyond phrasebooks for tourists. So I had to design my own course. Thanks to what I learned as a TEFL teacher I knew how to construct lesson plans and drills. So this is what I did. I still have notebooks full of my exercises. "This is a book." "This is a pen." "This would have been a pen yesterday had it not been an automobile." You know, all the kinds of thing we used to call pattern drills.

And then I hired a teacher. In fact, I had two teachers over those three years. They were excellent guys who were on the English faculty at our school and knew how to teach language. “So, Mr. Mu’ayyid,” I said, “would you like to come over twice a week and tutor me in Iraqi Arabic?” “Iraqi Arabic?” He protested, “are you nuts? That’s a terrible language. It’s street language!”

Normally you have to start with classical Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic as it’s now known. I said, “No, no, no; I don’t want to study classical Arabic. I want colloquial Iraqi.”

“Well there are no books for Iraqi Arabic,” he said. I said “Yes there are,” I said. “I just made a book. I just made the exercises, and the vocabulary.” I showed him and he seemed impressed. So we started a long three year association and it was delightful. I saw him again in 1990 when I was there on the Fulbright. He had me over for dinner and drinks and so forth; a lovely guy.

The other tutor was Mr. Abd al-Malik, if I recall correctly. He too was an outstanding guide to the language and culture. Between the two of them they got me through three years of Arabic – but unfortunately the ‘wrong kind’ of Arabic.

Q: Why do you say the wrong kind?

ALBIN: Because when I went to graduate school after I finally overcame the Gentleman’s C I told you about I was accepted for graduate study. I figured I had to do something to do penance for my poor undergrad record. My penance was five years overseas; that was the attraction that I used to get into a good graduate program. And it worked. But when I walked into my Arabic class the first day in Chicago with Professor Joseph Norment Bell, I realized I didn’t know the first thing about Arabic the way it’s supposed to be taught and learned at a university. I could barely read the alphabet and Professor Bell was expecting a full blown Arabist who simply needed a little polish before jumping into the classics. There were three of us in his class; two of us really, because the third guy was not a serious student and soon dropped out. It was supposed to be an intermediate Arabic class and neither of us was well prepared. As far as classical Arabic was concerned I was a rank greenhorn. I barely had the alphabet. Gary Garrison, my classmate, went on to an important career with the Fulbright operation. He still lives in the Washington area. We’re in frequent touch. Gary’s Arabic was not much better than mine because he had just come out of the Peace Corps in Tunisia where he had learned the street language. The third student was a guy named Sam X. Do you remember the X phenomenon from Malcolm X days in the 1960s and ‘70s?

Q: No.

ALBIN: Well Sam X was an X and-

Q: Does it mean black?

ALBIN: Yes.

Q: Coming out of the, when I say the militant black community.

ALBIN: Ah, exactly. That's what Sam X was, a militant student. What his background was I don't know, but he wound up at Chicago in Bell's Arabic class. He never prepared his assignments, and was frequently absent. I have no idea how he wound up at the university, it must have been something like affirmative action.

In any case Sam was not serious. One day, Bell asked him to read the assigned passage. He was unprepared, of course. He jumped up, threw his chair back against the wall of the tiny seminar room, making an attempt to pick up the oak table and toss it over. He kicked Joe in the shins, and stormed from the room, slammed the door, and was never seen again. So it was Gary and I for the rest of the year. That was the end of Sam X as classmate.

Q: I want to take you back to Iraq when you were there and the Shia-Sunni business.

ALBIN: Yes.

Q: How would they treat- You know, there are this- I'm not sure what they call it but this procession of the Shias and beating themselves.

ALBIN: Yes.

Q: Which is very divisive in a way.

ALBIN: No it ain't.

Q: Well I would think it would be divisive because they're talking about Muslim and Muslim persecution, you know, that-

ALBIN: Stop reading "The New York Times."

Q: Okay. Anyway, how was this treated-?

ALBIN: You're referring the annual commemoration called Ashura. That's the festival where they bleed, bruise and punish themselves in atonement for the martyrdom of Imam Husayn. "Festival" of course is the wrong word. Commemoration is a much more accurate term. It's anything but 'festive.' Each year, I would ride my bike to Kadhimiya, the shrine suburb of Baghdad. The mosque is the burial site of two of the revered imams of Shiism. It's a very holy place, and is the scene of the commemoration in the Baghdad area.

Ashura is ten days long. I would ride down there on my bike of an evening, chain it to a lamppost and then go mingle with the tens of thousands of pilgrims filling that quarter of

the city. I would go into the mosque, letting the crowd carry me through the wide entrance and try to get the best view I could of the passion play. Imam Hussein was on his horse confronting the Omayyad commander Yazid, companies of whose soldiers slaughtered Husayn and his small band of companions. Some of the pageant was in the form of a parade down the main street. The crowds would press close to the horsemen who were preceded by large, well-disciplined blocks of men, like a marching band, swinging chains and rhythmically lacerating their backs with barbed chains to the cadence of drums and horns. Other groups wielded swords with which they beat their heads, slicing gashes that would bleed down into their eyes and onto their chests. On the sidelines black-clad women would beat their breasts with palms and fists in acts of mourning.

Ambulances would inch their way through the throng to carry away the wounded. What with the sirens, drums, rhythmic chants and wailing the area was utter bedlam. No preparation from books or description by friends prepared me for this spectacle during my first visits. The only time I was ever scared was when I was wandering around through the side streets of Kadhimiya. Everywhere were crowds of mourners or hawkers of local food. I mean it was like- it was like a festival and a funeral at the same time, where everyone concentrated on the unspeakable tragedy that befell Imam Husayn and his relatives and companions. No one was paying any attention to me. But as you strayed from the center of action things got more festive, people selling things, sweets and rides for kids and things like that. That was the amusement park part, more of a festival. But center stage was serious devotion and serious business with the passion reenactment, the chains and swords, and the blood.

One evening I was walking on the edge of the crowd down an alley, still crowded but away from the center of things. I didn't realize that I had entered, a cul-de-sac, a short, narrow blind alley at the end which, no farther away than from here to the front door, were guys with their whetstones, their old-fashioned grinding wheels for sharpening the swords. Sparks were flying, and metal rasped zzzzzzz, zzzzzzz, zzzzzzz. There was a small group of customers around the operation. They all turned and looked at me and walked me right out of the alley with their stares. That was the only time that I felt uncomfortable, downright frightened, even.

Q: What about Iranian influence and all at that time?

ALBIN: Kadhimiya was and remains an important pilgrim destination for the Iranian religious tourists coming in by bus. There were several ways that Shia pilgrims from Iran came into Iraq, and there are many Shia shrines in Iraq. An Iranian hajji would try to visit them all on packaged pilgrimages, just like going to Rome or Jerusalem.

A major route was from the north of Baghdad along the highway from Hamadan in Iran, across the border to Khanaqin in Iraq; coming south they would spur off to Samara where there was a big Shia shrine. In fact, it is a very, very big Shia holy place, very historic, very holy, and then they would make their way down to Kadhimiya in Baghdad. Kadhimiya to me was not a suburb, but a quarter of the city integral to the rest of

Baghdad. Others, other travelers or authors, will refer to it as a separate town, as though it were separate from the city. But it was part of the municipality of Baghdad so to me it was just another part of town. This is important because viewing Kadhimiya as separate simply because it is so deeply Shia falsely highlights the dichotomy between the two religious communities. That's exactly what got us into trouble later, in 2003.

The pilgrims would come down south, drive south in their vans and buses to Kadhimiya, spending a day or two there at the shrine, then go on to Najaf and Karbala, and finally go back home. That was the general route. There was also southern route through Khorramshahr and Abadan, through Basra and then north from Basra. I wasn't acquainted with that route, but the pilgrims came that way too.

These buses would come into town, to Kadhimiya, of course. After leaving Afghanistan my Persian was pretty good. I would go to Kadhimiya on my bike on weekends or days off to practice Arabic and to keep my Persian fresh. The buses would arrive with the pilgrims, simple peasants who had saved up their entire lives for this pilgrimage. They didn't have a lot of cash. What they brought to finance their trip were carpets, brassware, glassware, printed fabrics, and trinkets of all kinds. The Kadhimiya merchants would wait at the door of the bus and buy this stuff from them, cheating them, giving them really crappy prices for their stuff. The poor Iranians could continue their trip with what little cash they could get. I stood at the door of the bus to haggle on behalf of the Iranian peasants, trying to get them a better price from the rapacious Iraqi merchants. It was good linguistic practice for me.

Q: I'm surprised you didn't get knocked off or something.

ALBIN: It wasn't like that. But people, Westerners, were afraid to go there, especially during Ashura. I was the only one, as far as I ever observed. The Jesuits at the college thought I was crazy. I remember taking a few of the American lay teachers, young men my age, to Kadhimiya during Ashura, but only in the daytime when things were quiet. The area was crowded, day or night, with pilgrims from all over the Shia world, Lebanon, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and elsewhere.

Q: Well what, I mean were relations with Iran, I mean were you seeing separation between the two states, you know-

ALBIN: Irrelevant. Iran was just another country. I personally had to get a visa to go to Iran. I went there frequently on vacation or if we had a long holiday like Christmas. I'd have two weeks off or something like that; I'd go to Iran because it was cleaner than Baghdad, the food was different, better, I could maybe find a girl. Tehran, you know, was a big city, sophisticated, Europeanized.

Q: How about Saudi Arabia? I mean was this- did the normal Iraqi go on a Hajj I mean, was Saudi Arabia a place to go to?

ALBIN: As I mentioned, Baghdad College was by and large populated by Iraq's upper classes and it's not that the upper classes didn't make the hajj, they may have. But what they would talk to me and the other Americans, or among each other, about was their last trip to Beirut or their last trip to London or Paris. Those were the places to go. Most Iraqis I socialized with didn't make a big, overt to-do about religion. It wasn't like now.

Saudi Arabia and the Wahhabis and the Wahhabi influence and all of the nastiness that emanates from the Gulf and Saudi Arabia didn't exist then. I'm trying to think back to an era that seems like hundreds of years ago, but is only 40 or 50 years ago. It was a different country. The big issue was the Kurds. Iraq had all it could do to keep them quiet. That was the bone of contention.

Q: It was also the period, if you recall- I can't think of his name right now- but there was a very influential book that came out in the United States about Iraq being named as a takeoff country, that it had a small population, highly literate, it had oil but it had good agriculture. I mean it had everything together, it wasn't dependent, and this was a country that was really going to move up into at least the, if not the first tier the second tier. I mean this was very much the impression at that time.

ALBIN: Thank you for stimulating that. I don't know exactly what book you're referring to. By the time I got there in the mid-'60s the good days were over. Who killed the fatted calf, who killed this dream of a takeoff, Iran? Abd al-Karim Qasim? Again, I remind you, I was teaching the kids, the boys- it was a boys' school, by the way- I was teaching the sons of Iraq's elite. They had no use for Qasim. Their families had lost out in the Revolution of 1958; their factories were nationalized, their banks were nationalized, their land holdings were confiscated during the Qasim regime. During his regime the communists and the Ba'athis duked it out. Iraq became a Communist-Ba'athi playground – battleground. In fact, a killing zone. The Ba'athis hated the Communists, the Communists hated the Ba'athis and they set out to kill each other and Abd al-Karim Qasim got caught in the middle of this and was eventually executed because of this factional fighting. Iraqis became victims on July 14, 1958, the day Qasim took over.

Q: I was in Dhahran when that happened. I remember reading about it.

ALBIN: Yes. It was a big deal; it was a big deal regionally. Let me try to summarize. Iraq was Iraq. We had the United Arab Republic, we had Nasser -- we had the charisma of Nasser. We had brotherhood with the Palestinians, we had the anti-Zionists trend, the anti-Israeli trend; all of those pan-Arab magnets were there in Iraq and there were factions who were attracted, like iron filings to those magnets. But Iraq's politics was not driven by these outside forces. It wasn't Arabism that powered Iraqi politics any more than Arabism drives Iraqi politics today. In my view, most Iraqis focused on their own local and family concerns, trying to survive the changes resulting from 1958 and make the best of a bad situation. Iraqi politics became divorced from Iraqi culture.

Questions you ask about the Sunni-Shia divide, or about the influence of Saudi Arabia or Iran are pretty irrelevant during the period of the mid-to-late '60s. Quite irrelevant. Of course Iraqis love to talk politics, but few Iraqis wanted to live politics. Politics in that era, and more so later, was dangerous. The Iran-Iraq war was 10 years in the future. Saddam had not established his power yet. The totalitarian plant was just a seedling. Kurdish nationalism was probably the most salient threat to Iraq's unity.

Q: Were you aware of the Kurds; did they have influence in Baghdad or anything?

ALBIN: In those days I would have to say from my perspective, I don't know what the embassy was reporting but as far as I was concerned the Kurds were the guys that carried refrigerators and other heavy goods on their backs to deliver from the store to the customer. That's what a Kurd was; a Kurd was a human donkey or human fork-lift.

Q: Yes.

ALBIN: I don't mean that in a pejorative way.

Q: No, no, I understand.

ALBIN: Every country in those days had a similar class of people.

Q: Yes, yes.

ALBIN: The Hazaras in Afghanistan were such people. They filled the same social and economic space. Now they're a powerful political bloc and feeling their oats. I'm referring to the Kurds one saw in Baghdad. I'm not talking about the Kurds in the north of the country about which I knew nothing except what I saw in the newspaper or heard on BBC World Service regarding political and military unrest.

Q: I know.

ALBIN: As far as I know there were no or very few Kurds at Baghdad College.

Q: How about Ba'athists and communists in your circle?

ALBIN: Well, as I mentioned, during the golden two years, '66, '67, part of '68, Teb and I and Father John Donahue and some of the interested lay teachers at Baghdad College and at Al-Hikma University could talk about any aspect of politics with anybody without fear of being reported to the secret police or risk having our visas or work permits revoked. If the communists and the Ba'athis had a shootout in the street, word filtered around. We, on the sidelines far from the action, would discuss it. We never knew many details because news never reached the TV or newspapers, both of which were owned and operated by the State. There were occasional dustups and violence mostly it seemed in the Mosul area, in the northern part of the country. Again, word slipped out that there was an attempted coup or that the army, a la Abd al-Karim Qasim, had moved with

loaded weapons toward an army camp, toward the central government building or the broadcasting station or things like that. All of that was grist for conversation but nobody knew any real facts, at least I didn't. These things were happening all the time.

I later wrote a Master's thesis on the politics of the 1950s when the Baghdad Pact was under discussion. Even in that less restrictive era, hard news was difficult to come by. At that time political life was on simmer, you might say. Then, beginning in '68, little by little Saddam and his crowd turned the heat up until Iraq became an inward-looking single party state from which no news leaked out internally or externally.

Q: Did you see any posters, signs of Nasser at that point?

ALBIN: No. That's good a good question. No, I didn't.

Q: Certainly, I mean, in many parts of the souk in other Arab countries Nasser was- Of course the '67 War kind of diminished his-

ALBIN: His charisma.

Q: -charisma, yes.

ALBIN: Nasserism was a spent force after '67 and remains so. There are still a few Nasserists around, even in Iraq. But you have to look pretty deep to find them.

Let's talk about 1967 for a minute. The '67 War, June 6, the war burst on the scene all of a sudden, as you know. We Americans, and I assume the embassy included, we Americans had to get the hell out. We were advised if not ordered to go. I was on a small stipend, as I described, and had no money to return home. What to do, where to go? Iran, that is Tehran, was expensive; the Gulf too was way out of my price range. So where to go? I got on a bus and I went back to Afghanistan, where I spent the rest of the summer, returning to Baghdad just in time for the new school year, academic '67-'68. I was on pins and needles all summer long as to whether the school would reopen after the war, which, according to widespread propaganda we caused because we goaded the Israelis to attack. So we American faculty weren't sure whether we would be allowed back into the country. It wasn't actually until I got back into Baghdad that I was absolutely positive we were going to open on time for the school year.

On the way back from Afghanistan I hitchhiked from Kabul to Herat and then from Herat to the Iranian border and then on to Mashed. From there I took a bus to Tehran. I went to the American embassy to try to get some news on the situation in Baghdad. I stayed in a fleabag hotel or the TBT bus station in Teheran. I went to the embassy, the consular section, to see if there were any no-go postings about Iraq. I was sitting in the office of a consular person. My passport was in the back pocket of my jeans. As I sat there the guy got a phone call and he said, "Yes, we're stamping all American passports no-go for Iraq." I pushed my passport a little farther down in my pocket, said, "Thanks, nice meeting you," and I left while he was still on the phone. I didn't want him doing

whatever you guys do to passports under those circumstances. I got on a bus that day or the next and returned to Baghdad.

Q: Well you left there- I'm looking at the time- you left there when? Left Baghdad when?

ALBIN: You mean left because of the '67 War?

Q: Yes.

ALBIN: Probably left on June 6 or June 7.

Q: Yes but I mean when you- how long were you back before you finally left Baghdad?

ALBIN: Oh, I got back, it's August or September, before school started, of 1967 and I stayed 'til Saddam kicked out the American faculty at the end of the school year in May or June of '69.

Q: After the '67 War did things change or not?

ALBIN: As I recall things did not get really bad until Saddam's Ba'athis took over for good in July 1968. From then on, my phone was tapped; immediately I had a phone tap and people following me on my bike. If I took a bus there'd be a plainclothesman on the bus. Our conversations in school with parents, with friends, with students diminished. The only people I could talk to were maybe the close friends I mentioned before. My Iraqi tutors were fearless.

Q: Well this was- Was this Saddam or was this Saddam's-?

ALBIN: Let's call it Saddam. He was vice-president.

Q: Yes was vice president so the president- But I mean all this was put in place?

ALBIN: It was a-building before. There were antecedents, of course. But the new police state structure was put in place immediately.

Q: These were the Ba'aths?

ALBIN: These were the Baathis, yes.

Q: How did you feel about the Baath Party at the time? I mean-

ALBIN: Thugs, cutthroats. I have a picture- I wish I- I wish we had digital photography in those days. I took my- I don't remember what the year was; it might have been the summer of '68. There was a lot of hoo-hah about spies; spies, spies, spies. So, I was a spy and all of us at the school were American spies.

There was going to be a public execution down at the main city square, Tahrir Square, in downtown Baghdad. I rode my bike down to see the execution. Damned if they didn't execute- hang from a scaffold- about six or eight poor 'Zionist spies'. Iraq was closed down, hysteria reigned. I remember during the summer vacation trying to make a trip down river to visit the Marshes, the famous Iraqi marshes. I went with Jim Callahan who was a lay teacher in those days in Baghdad College. Jim and I took a taxi way down south, maybe 200 miles, 250 miles south to the Marshes. As I had done on an earlier trip, I got out of the taxi- it was one of those inter-city taxis, you know, a long-distance taxi. No sooner did we set foot on the road than two thugs came up in short sleeved shirts, their handguns on their belts. "Who are you? What are you doing here? Let me see your passports." Then, "I want you out of here immediately. Where do you live?" I told them. "Then go back to Baghdad now." He flagged down the first taxi going north, and told the guy to take us to Baghdad. "But sir, but sir!" protested the hapless driver. "Take them to Baghdad now." That was the kind of clamp that the Ba'athis put on the country from the very first weeks of their rule.

Q: Did your students change?

ALBIN: Yes, we stopped talking to them about politics. Politics became verboten. The composition of the student body didn't change nor did our Ford Foundation evening commitments. Teb and I continued to prepare course materials, we continued to teach in the evenings and the practice teaching sessions; it was business as usual from that point of view. But from the standpoint of closing the country down, that began almost immediately. From the political standpoint, it took a couple of years for the Ba'ath to consolidate their grip because opposition forces, the communists and others, were strong and people resisted, people pushed back. I think in that first year the communists were grouped with the liberals, at least in many people's minds. To these factions the Ba'ath were bad guys; they were the thugs, they were the people who were going to try to impose a dictatorship and the communists were among those opposed to them. Many Shia were communists or sympathizers.

I used to go to art galleries a lot. I never heard of an artist who was a Ba'athi. I never heard, for example, that anyone in artistic circles was a Ba'athi. This cannot be absolutely true of course. People of that class were, it seemed to me, in whispered opposition to the Party.

Q: Well you know I- this goes back to '57; I mean when was July 14, was it '57?

ALBIN: Fifty-eight.

Q: Fifty-eight? At the consul general in Dhahran and other places where I've been, see you really want to watch your Iraq because when the Iraqi mob gets going they rip people apart, you know. I mean that was, you know, Iraqis were considered by those of us in the diplomatic profession as being a pretty wild, ruthless, mindless mob.

ALBIN: Ruthless yes, mindless-

Q: No but you know what I mean.

ALBIN: Oh yes. In fact the Iraqis in those days said of themselves that they have ‘hot blood.’

Q: Just like a lynch mob in the South, the American South. I mean you didn’t want to fool around.

ALBIN: Yes, I follow you. And the Iraqis would say of themselves, “We Iraqis are “hot blooded””, a characterization that was widespread. If you heard it in Saudi Arabia, I’m not surprised.

Q: Okay. Well I’m looking at the time; it’s a good place to stop. Where did you, when you left in ’69 where did you go?

ALBIN: Well by that time I had been accepted by the University of Chicago for an MA degree in international relations so my ultimate destination for the fall of ’69 was Chicago. We left Iraq *en masse* on or about June 1 of 1969. The school was shut down; the Americans just left the country. I don’t remember what date I left but let’s say June 1, 1969.

Q: Okay. So we’ll pick it up then. Great.

ALBIN: I want to compliment you. You’re doing a fantastic job at listening.

Q: Well I enjoy it, really enjoy it.

ALBIN: Well good.

Q: Today is the 9th of May, 2013, with Mike Albin.

And Mike, you wanted me to fill in by asking you how come you didn’t end up in the military as opposed to going to the Peace Corps?

ALBIN: Well I was coming of age for the draft, in fact, eligible for the draft in 1964 when I graduated from college and was fully expecting the draft letter, which indeed came. So I could have gone into the army immediately but didn’t for a couple of reasons. One is that my mother, she was a widow, continued to harass the bishop, the Catholic bishop of Gary, Indiana, to use his influence to wave induction. I’m not sure exactly what happened, but the draft board waived my case. I think draft boards were basically local and probably subject to local pressure, I don’t know for sure. Anyway, I had my letter of acceptance from the Peace Corps and on the strength of that they exempted me at least temporarily so I could attend the training in Vermont. While I was in training she continued to contact the bishop. However, when I finally did get the order to “appear at the armory for your pre-induction physical” I happened to be home after training and

before flying out. I was summoned by letter to report, which I did; I got on a bus and went with other young men to the armory to take my physical. The sergeant at the first station gave me the eye test. I peered into this machine and tried to read the letters. Without my glasses I couldn't even see the top letter. Then there were animals. I couldn't make out whether it was a grizzly bear or a pussycat. Finally, he said, "Son, get back on the bus. We ain't taking you." So I got on the bus and a little later I got a 4-F notice in the mail.

I was glad I went into the Peace Corps instead of the Marine Corps under the circumstances but I was never an opponent of the Vietnam War; I was always a proponent of what we were there to do in Vietnam and remain a very strong proponent of our experience in Vietnam. I think it's one of the reasons that decades later I had no compunction about signing up for the Army to get to either Afghanistan or Iraq. As it turned out the Army chose me for Iraq. That was fine with me so I spent two-ish years deployed and another year or so working for the Army at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas doing cultural training for the Army there. But I was never opposed to the war; I was glad I didn't get deployed to Vietnam. I'm glad I didn't have to break what I laughingly call my career path. I didn't want to go to Germany or Korea or Vietnam. I didn't grow up in an Army family, I didn't know anything about military culture and it just seemed a really foreign path for me. So that's why I didn't get drafted.

Q: Okay. Well we've got you and all of your colleagues, American colleagues being expelled from Iraq.

ALBIN: Ah. That's where we are.

Q: And that's where we are so whither and what?

First place I want to ask, when you left Iraq, okay the Ba'ath Party had taken over in a big way by this time. How did- But the Iraqis were probably the most literate and- I mean all positive things; how did- what did you feel for the future of Iraq when you left? Whither Iraq?

ALBIN: Yes, whither Iraq rather than whither Mike. Iraq was destroyed as a viable developing country in 1958 when Abdul Karim Qasim took over. He nationalized a lot of the industries, probably most of the economy; he was following in Abdel Nasser's footsteps and was in all ways a mini-Nasser. What I think killed Iraq most dramatically and that which has gotten the most press and the most academic ink was the land reform. He nationalized the large farms and took them out of the hands of sheikhs or large landowners, who were, after all, investors in the prosperity of their enterprises, and doled the land out to the peasants. Lots of dissertations have been written on this subject. It was the thing to do at the time. They did so-called land reform in Latin America, they did it in the Middle East, Abdel Nasser did it in Egypt; the Shah of Iran with his White Revolution attempted similar things. Abdul Karim Qasim may have been many things good and bad, but he wasn't an economist. Nor was he a necessarily a communist. He was just a guy that went along with the flow of the times, emulating Nasser and others,

Castro and all that Third World class of leader, Sukarno and Nkrumah and all those dictators who were going to transform their countries.

Well he didn't transform his country in any sense into a viable developing nation. Saddam followed in the footsteps of Qasim, with the exception that he was a bloodthirsty brute while Abdul Karim Qasim was not a brute. Qasim had his eyes on dictatorship, which slowly developed from '58 onwards, as we know. Many think the CIA engineered his demise and installed Saddam, who built on Qasim's tyrannical legacy. That legacy is still very much alive today to the extent that last night I was at an Iraqi affair at which an Iraqi-American who's been in this country for 50 years, a physician, stopped me afterwards to tell me he'd enjoyed my comments. "It's not often that we hear the truth about how Qasim destroyed Iraq," he said. Most people don't have such long memories; they refer to the Saddam era as the dark ages, but this doctor, as was so often the case in days of yore, when the Qasim generation was still alive, blamed the demise, the degeneracy of Iraq on Abdul Karim Qasim. As a student of Iraqi history, I tend to think they're right about that.

Q: Well, okay. Whither you?

ALBIN: So I left Iraq by plane, I think. I may have gone overland, I don't remember, but I had little money, beyond what I'd saved from my last couple of paychecks. This was in June 1969. School in Chicago didn't start till September.

Q: Where?

ALBIN: University of Chicago, where I knew one of the requirements for an MA was a foreign language. I was enrolled in the Committee for International Relations, as it was termed in those days. I was to report sometime in September for registration. I looked around for places that were cheap to pass a summer of fun and learn a language at the same time. What better place than France? I enrolled in an intensive French course that lasted eight or 10 weeks at the University of Besancon in rural eastern France. Had a great time there; boned up on French so I could pass a language exam eventually. The course of instruction was very, very good. Fell in love, fell out of love, things like that, because France was very different from Iraq and I had a good time in very different ways, and eventually wound up at Chicago for the next couple of years.

Q: You were in Chicago from when to when?

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ALBIN: I was in Chicago from September of '69 to, I think it was graduation time, springish of '72. I had a wonderful experience, met and married my wife there. Elaine was a graduate student in the English department and I was in the international relations committee. We dated and eventually were married on the date of our second graduation. We both of us got two MAs there; I got one in international relations and library science; she got one in English and library science. We were married on the 9th of June 1971. We immediately left for Cairo where I had a one year fellowship at the Center for Arabic Studies Abroad (CASA).

Q: Well let's talk about Chicago. First place, Chicago is sans- is somewhat unique among universities. Hutchison, you know, set the pattern.

ALBIN: It's Hutchins, Robert Maynard Hutchins.

Q: Hutchins dropped the football. I mean let's talk about the school as you saw it when you got there.

ALBIN: Well it was a revelation. I had matured a lot in the five years overseas, two in Afghanistan, three in Iraq, and- but I wasn't mature; just- I had matured. I still haven't matured.

In any case I enjoyed my time there from start to finish. I had fantastic professors in the international relations area; I didn't have such luck with the faculty of the library school but I respected them. I had a couple of courses that I really enjoyed, got my teeth into. Wrote a couple of masters theses, both of which were on Iraq. The first one for the IR (international relations) committee was on the Baghdad Pact and the Iraqi approach to it. The other thesis was on the history of printing in Iraq. Both topics fascinated me and I got into them deeply. In the case of IR, I thought seriously about going on for a PhD. However, academics at that time, I mean the academic life as a career, was filling up with people like me who were graduating from programs and then couldn't find university jobs; couldn't find a job in academe, the media, or even in the government. I went to my main professor. I had two main professors; both of them supervised my IR thesis on the Baghdad Pact. One of them was the world famous Hans Morgenthau whom I respected a lot. The other one while not as well-known was even more brilliant, Morton Kaplan, who was at the time chairman of the IR committee so he had administrative as well as academic oversight of me. A brilliant guy; I took as many classes with him as I could. The third man who didn't have an influence on my career professionally, although intellectually he did, was Albert Wohlstetter, who was also on the IR faculty. Wohlstetter was a well-known policy figure nationally and internationally at the time, although his legacy is not as celebrated as Morgenthau's, more's the pity.

Q: Name- we can spell it.

ALBIN: Wohlstetter at one point, by gossip and folklore, was the model for Dr. Strangelove and if you recall-

Q: In the movie, yes.

ALBIN: -the movie, yes, if you recall the movie. In any case Wohlstetter was a marvelous man and his wife, Alberta, was an equally exceptional scholar and very influential. Her history of Pearl Harbor is a classic and pioneering study of the disastrous dangers of stovepiped information and intelligence, and the limits of bureaucracy.

Q: We're thinking of narrowly focused bureaucracies that have the nickname "stovepipe."

ALBIN: Correct. Hers is a study of bureaucracies very jealous of their own areas. Information is misinterpreted because no one has the big picture. It's a pathology inherent in administrations at all levels. I observed it at the Library of Congress, a tiny bureaucracy as these things are measured. And it reigns in the much larger administration of the US Army, as I observed later. It's as big a problem today as it was in 1930s and 1940s, about which Alberta Wohlstetter wrote.

Returning to Morton Kaplan, I went to see him as a counselor rather than as a professor one day as I got close to graduation. After my first year which I paid for myself, he was instrumental in getting me an NDFL (National Defense Foreign Language) fellowship which enabled me to continue my studies.

So I went to see him at the end of my second year and said, "Mr. Kaplan, I am at a crossroads. I am going to be getting my degree in June and I face two choices." Academically, I could enroll with the NDFL for a number of years, I don't remember exactly how many, three, four, five years, assuming conditions and grades were satisfactory. "But I don't like the future- the way the future looks for academic life," I said. "In the immediate future I can go into political science and do a PhD in political science where you yourself are a major light, but that would require me to learn a lot of math and do a lot of statistical work, which I have no aptitude for. The other path is to the history department. The outlook is pretty bleak for tenured positions in the field of Middle East history."

"So," I continued, "I've been accepted to the Graduate Library School here at Chicago and I will pay for it myself because I guess I'm not eligible to transfer the NDFL money over there." Kaplan, bless his heart, leaned on the desk, looked across at me and he said, "I don't care where the f--- you spend your money. Take it, and good luck to you." So I enrolled at the library school and used the NDFL there for the next two years.

One year was spent in Cairo at Center for Arabic Studies Abroad, which is housed, it still is housed at the American University in Cairo. It was a marvelous program and remains the best program in the field, as far as I know. We had 12 months of intense, round the clock Arabic, nothing but Arabic, and it prepared me for a lifetime's work with the Arabic language.

Q: When we say Arabic, there's Arabic and Arabic. Can you explain?

ALBIN: As I explained before, I made the mistake when I got to Iraq in 1966 of concentrating on the Iraqi dialect to the exclusion of good Arabic, or classical Arabic. That was a mistake that I was not allowed to make at AUC. They hammered us day and night on classical Arabic. They made a concession to Egypt to the extent that we got a course every term, there were three terms, in which we were drilled in Egyptian Arabic. When I graduated, got my certificate a year later, in 1972, I had reasonable fluency in

Egyptian and high comfort level in classical Arabic. So I tip my hat to CASA. I have recommended it to many students over the years and I don't hesitate to recommend it today to anybody contemplating a career in Arabic or Middle Eastern studies.

Q: What was the technique they used?

ALBIN: First of all, the curriculum was based on total immersion. The second principle was "never hire anybody who's anything but a first-rate teacher." Their faculty was outstanding. I guess the third commandment of curriculum development was to follow, but not slavishly, whatever was new in linguistic science and pedagogical research. So we did a great deal of language lab work, and great deal of reading. I think reading probably spoiled my first year of marriage because I was constantly at reading homework assignments far into the night. I have taught Arabic subsequently and have come to recognize that it's no shame to use the dictionary. You're never- no matter how good you are in Arabic -- you're never without a dictionary at hand. And I would burn the midnight oil week after week, month after month reading. We read medieval texts, modern novels, poetry of all eras, and drama. We discussed our reading in class. There were exercises and drills, particularly, I believe, if I recall correctly, in the language lab with the Egyptian dialect, which is very different from the Iraqi dialect and from MSA. So I had to unlearn my Iraqi Arabic. Those three factors, intensity, high quality faculty, and up to date research characterize the program.

Q: Now is- What were you in line for? What was this course's design?

ALBIN: For anything. My classmates numbered probably two dozen, something like that. It was a select course of study. I was damn lucky to be accepted for the course. I got a great recommendation from my Arabic teacher at U of C, Joseph Bell. He wrote me a very strong letter of recommendation. I passed the entrance exam; I don't know how, but I did. I was far from being the best student in the class, although no one worked harder than I did. The best Arabic student who really ought not to have been there at all, he was so good, was a guy named Peter Mollen who had been a soldier at the Monterey language school. I could tell you stories about Peter's career as an Arabist but I don't think I ought to. Let me just say it was outstanding. Some classmates went on to professorships in Arabic or Middle East history or the social sciences. Everett Rowson, for example, Eric Davis, and Peter Heath, Daniel Pipes to name a few. There were other people who had trained at universities like the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, which had much better Arabic programs than the University of Chicago. Chicago was Neanderthal in its approach to teaching oriental languages. I once enrolled for a Persian course and lasted three or four sessions before dropping it. It was simply awful. Joseph Bell, who was and remains a very close friend of mine, was the world's worst Arabic teacher. I've told that to everybody, never take Arabic with Joe Bell. He's a great scholar, knows the language as well as anyone, is a brilliant exegete, but as a language instructor he falls into the Orientalist trap of teaching the beginner as if he were an already an advanced scholar. In his defense he once told me, "But, Mike, you don't understand. My job was not to teach you Arabic, but to teach you what it would be like to know Arabic if you knew it well."

Anyway, those were some University of Chicago stories. What was in store for me, having matriculated from CASA was to finish my library degree. In those days the University of Chicago was the only library school in the country that gave an MA rather than an MLS, the thought being that one ought to receive an academic degree rather than a trade license.

Q: I wanted to take you back to Cairo.

ALBIN: Ah.

Q: What was Cairo like at the time?

ALBIN: Oh, thank you. That was fast times at AUC, I'll tell you. We all worked hard. We all worked really hard. But we all had a marvelous social time with Egyptians, we socialized with the faculty, at coffeehouses, and at bars. We had the run of the city, and the country. We could go up and down the Nile. Some areas were off limits, like the Canal or the oases in the Western Desert. My stipend as a student was piddly, but my wife worked in the English department so her stipend is what kept us- kept me- in beer money and allowed us to enjoy trips along the Nile down to Luxor and Aswan and so forth on luxury boats, because in those days, after the '67 War, like today, there were no tourists. All the terrific touristic, historical opportunities went begging and so we took advantage of them on her salary and my paltry stipend.

Egypt was poor. Egypt was socialized, Nasserized, just like Qasimized Iraq, destroyed. That is, there was one Western grocery store in Cairo. What was the city's population in those days, 1971? I don't remember. Let's say it was between 12 and 15 million...an immense, poor, dirty, happily bustling city. Let me put on my librarian's cloak for a moment. For a feel for Cairo under late Nasser and early Sadat (Nasser died in 1970, you'll recall.) read scholars Janet Abu-Lughod and John Waterbury. The one is muscle-bound with data, and the other is a most honest and forthright academic observer of the Egypt of the period.

There was one Western grocery store where we could get ketchup, canned tuna, and a few other black market basics. Everything else in the country was Egyptian made. I don't have time to go into the politics and economics of import substitution. Nationalized Egyptian factories couldn't produce anything that was any good to eat or to use. The economy was a joke. There were cars that didn't run, cigarettes that didn't light, matches that exploded when struck, soap that didn't bubble, bulbs that popped as soon as you screwed them in and flipped the switch, flat beer, questionable hygiene in cafes and restaurants. The entire society, including the unfortunate education system, was founded on "Egyptian good enough."

Q: I mean, looking at it at that time I'll say tourism; what the hell kept the country going?

ALBIN: Bloody nothing. I don't know. The cotton trade was destroyed by Nasser when he sequestered all those wealthy landowners, sequestered the land of the landowners so cotton and agricultural products were very definitely hurt. Cotton was the biggest export in the country in those days, I suppose. They couldn't feed themselves so we, the United States, supplied wheat and agricultural surplus products under PL480, which I'll explain later.

Q: Did we have relations when you were there with them?

ALBIN: No, we didn't; we didn't have relations. I think under those anti-American strictures we were represented by the Spanish embassy, I think. But it could have been the Swiss embassy. I don't remember, and it didn't matter to us students.

Q: It goes back and forth.

ALBIN: Yes.

Q: Well, I mean, did you feel the fact that we didn't have representation, did that cause you to feel isolated or cause problems?

ALBIN: No, because as usual with American embassies they meant nothing to me. I explained to you what my view was in earlier days in Peace Corps times and Baghdad College times. Embassies didn't matter. American diplomatic presence didn't matter. We, the US, had no influence in Egypt then or now, so the embassy might just as well have been run by the Spaniards or Martians. I think we were maybe invited to a Fourth of July party that year.

If the economy was a laughing stock, education was a tear-jerker. Egyptian education in general and university education in particular had gone from bad to zero, destroyed by Nasser with his policy of 'everybody gets a university degree and a job' whether they deserve it or not. It's the same path we ourselves are following today. Cairo U, Ain Shams University, Alexandria University may have had, like Iraqi universities, a remnant of old timers, old time pros with real degrees from abroad. In order to become recognized as a world class professor, especially in the sciences and engineering and medicine, you had to get your PhD abroad. For that you needed hard currency which in those days was scarce. After the nationalizations no one had money for college or grad school overseas, so everyone depended on the government, which in turn depended in the main on foreign largesse from the West or the East Bloc. Poor Abdel Nasser couldn't balance the needs of the impoverished populace with the needs of a first class education system. So something had to give and let me tell you, both of them gave. Egypt could neither feed nor educate itself.

Q: Well would AU or-

ALBIN: AUC.

Q: -AUC, was that immune from this?

ALBIN: AUC was far from an international class university in those days. I think it's probably much better now.

And by the way the CASA program was not an integral part of the American University in Cairo. It was housed at the American University in Cairo and enjoyed some of the administrative services of the university but was a national program, a U.S. national program, funded largely by maybe Defense or other federal agencies to promote the study of Arabic overseas- the study of Arabic and familiarity with Arab culture for students like myself but it wasn't really a department of AUC. AUC was a third rate university with third rate faculty with sixth rate students. I think it's probably better now; it has higher quality, it has more money. AID (United States Agency for International Development) has been a big benefactor, in fact probably "the" benefactor of AUC over the years to maintain American influence in the country. Arab money has also contributed to business and engineering programs. I've lost touch with the school, but from what I've observed from a distance it's improved a lot over the years. They have a new campus, you know.

Q: Well was the student body, as were so many in the Arab world, was it a very volatile political group or apathetic or what?

ALBIN: Yes, that's a good question. AUC students came from the old-money families on the whole. They were interested more in getting to Europe for the Gucci shopping than they were in the issues of the day. As far as I could tell they weren't interested in social or political matters. There was the Palestinian cause, of course. But after the 1967 defeat there wasn't anything Egypt or Egyptian students could do about it. They all hated Israel ritually and the United States but they went to the American school and daddy paid the tuition and they had a good time.

I can't speak to AUC today. I think it's probably a whole lot better. Regionally it was not even close to the American University in Beirut. AUB was far in advance academically of AUC.

Q: But then you say your language courses a different kettle of fish.

ALBIN: Yes, they were. The program was administered in those days by the University of Michigan. Nowadays it's administered out of the University of Texas at Austin. Topnotch professors run the program today and topnotch professors ran the place in those days.

Q: Well did you feel any particular burden by being an American at this particular time in Egypt?

ALBIN: Being American was a conversation piece with the Egyptians just like it was with the Iraqis during my time there. We were unusual, out of the ordinary. Many people couldn't figure out what we were doing there. We weren't tourists, weren't businessmen.

There was no category for us. We were perceived as agents of the CIA. We were hammered about American policy vis-à-vis Israel and the Palestinians. The Arabs or the Egyptians, like the Iraqis, were looking for conspiracies and that sort of thing so there was a great deal of distrust about America, about U.S. policy. I guess I could go back and recollect where we were in 1971, where we, the United States, was in 1971 politically with regard to regional politics but the story is pretty well known. I was a graduate student; I was interested in Arabic, I was interested in learning as much about Egypt as I could, I was grateful as hell for the opportunity to be where I was. I made lots of good Egyptian friends, made lots of good American friends among the student body at AUC, friends I have to this day and whom I see frequently. I'm having a reunion with some of them tomorrow, as a matter of fact.

Q: Well NASSER was terribly popular in the Arab world around this time.

ALBIN: Well why? Well why?

Q: Well why, yes. I mean did it intrude or was it- I mean what were your observations on it?

ALBIN: I think it's fair to say that Nasser was no Saddam, although he had his cruel side. Nasser was not the bloodthirsty brute that Saddam was, so that made life a lot easier for foreigners like us, even a low level of foreigners, at the student level. We were never harassed, the phones were never overtly tapped, mostly because the phones didn't work. We weren't conspicuously and threateningly shadowed like I was in Baghdad after the Baathist coup. We didn't feel the pressure of Nasserism. We sort of floated on top of it. To me personally Anwar Sadat was a laugh, there were new jokes every day about him, but to the Egyptians generally his rule was a purgatory.

Q: Well you know, I've talked to people who've served in the Sinai field of operations and all and were saying the contrast between the Israeli soldiers and the Egyptian soldiers; Egyptians, you know, they're- Egyptians are basically laidback.

ALBIN: Yes, I'd agree. The Egyptian populace in general is laidback and the army probably reflects that. I have some opinions that I'll let go of later about what we're seeing with regard to the Arab Spring and the Egyptian personality.

Q: Oh, okay. Well let's keep plugging ahead.

While you were doing this were you pointed towards the Library of Congress?

ALBIN: No. Let's start the Library of Congress chapter of my life.

Q: Okay.

ALBIN: The Library of Congress began its life in Egypt in 1963. If you remember the Egyptian revolution was in 1952. Ten years, 11 years later the Library of Congress

established an office in Cairo. Let me go into the establishment of that office since it absorbed much of my career and is one of the reasons that I'm here talking to you.

In those days, as I mentioned, we were supplying Egypt with cut-rate wheat under Public Law 480. Sometime or other as Public Law 480 shipments proceeded, the soft currency repayments such as the Egyptian pound, the Indian rupee, the Polish zloty, the Israeli shekel or whatever it was, pound in those days, were accumulating at the U.S. Treasury and nobody knew what to do with all this funny money.

Q: The Indian debt, for example, represented, I mean, practically the entire budget. I mean, was this huge mound that they-

ALBIN: Remember Moynihan? When he was ambassador, he just gave it away, gave it back to the Indians. He had no idea what to do with it. Anyway, we were in a similar situation with regard to Egypt, we, the United States that is. Somewhere along the line in the early '60s, I don't remember right now, a couple of members in Congress with the help of the State Department and Treasury and Library of Congress and maybe some other academic organizations put their heads together and asked why we don't use some of this money for beneficial purposes, scholarly purposes that benefit both the host country and the United States. Educational enterprises were among those uses. I recall that USAID was said to dip into a lot of those Egyptian pounds to help finance the local costs of AUC.

In any case, the Library, along with CASA and Fulbright, and USIA for its book translation, publishing and local expenses, and the American Research Center in Egypt (ARCE), convinced Congress to write them into the budget for dispersal of the Egyptian currency held by Treasury. That meant that by the time I got there in '71 the Library's acquisitions and processing office had been in existence for eight years. That didn't mean much to me at the time. But as a budding Orientalist, and I use that term advisedly and correctly, because Orientalist has become a dirty word since Edward Said's destructive book came out in the 1970s, I was interested in books. Let's put Said aside for later discussion if we want to go into intellectual currents in the Arab world or in Egypt specifically.

As a budding Orientalist or Arabist or Middle Eastern studies specialist I wanted to buy as many books as I could afford, and I did. I bought novels and classical literature, books that I knew were going to supplement my studies and help me with my forthcoming Master's thesis on the history of printing in the Middle East. So during my sojourn I put together a small library on Egyptian and Arab cultural history, about which I've written a couple of theses and articles and lectures.

Anyway, I bought a lot of books. The question was how to get the books out of Egypt and back home? All of us in CASA faced the same problem. All of us who were doing serious study or intended to do serious academic work bought a lot of books. The Library of Congress office in those days was operating almost entirely out of funny money. Let me explain how that-

Q: Can we stop just one second?

ALBIN: Yes.

Q: Yes.

ALBIN: So. Let me back up a little bit in the explanation of the intersection of me and the Library of Congress. During my year there as a student I developed a disease, I guess it would be called bibliomania or a psychosis called bibliolatriy.

Q: Oh yes.

ALBIN: I think I'm addicted.

Q: Terrible, terrible disease particularly if you're travel-

ALBIN: You're damn right. It turned out to be my career for a number of years. So I collected all these books. What did the office in Cairo do? It was funded under PL480 except for the director's salary, which was dollar denominated paid out of regular appropriations. The office operates to supply the Library with books from Egypt and from the Arabic speaking world and nowadays from Turkey and maybe some other assorted countries like Malta, using hard currency. I'll get into that when I get into my career with the Library.

The office was run by a field director (which I became a few years later) and a staff in those days of a dozen or 15 local employees, FSNs (Foreign Service Nationals). They were all FSNs except for the field director, Alvin Moore in those days, who was an American seconded from the Library of Congress to run the office.

My CASA classmates and I took our books to Al Moore's office where he kindly saw to it that they were sent home gratis using the funny money. He considered it part of his educational mission. He used his Egyptian-denominated funds to wrap the books and shepherd them through Customs. It was a vital service and one that I maintained throughout my tenure later on.

That's the way I first came into contact with the Library of Congress. I didn't know Al well, just to shake his hand and drop off books. He was not an Arabist, he didn't know much about Egypt and its modern culture. I simply dropped off the books with a staff member and they were sent to my address in Chicago.

I knew I was going to go back to library school at Chicago. It seemed to me that it would be a great idea to work for the Library of Congress and to actually run its office in Cairo. That was my developing dream when I returned home and began library school. My wife and I finished the year in Cairo. She was a really good sport. She was from Parma, Ohio, a suburb of Cleveland, and had never been out of the United States, had never

experienced the delights of third-world Egypt where you could get black market ketchup every once in a while at Vasalakis's grocery store and maybe some canned vegetables from Del Monte or Campbell's soup but all the rest of our diet was from the economy. She was good-humored about it all and resourceful. She died of cancer in 2004.

So we returned to Chicago for our last year at the library school. Elaine had already finished her English MA. She had wanted to go on for the doctorate and become an English professor. I should digress to her career for just a minute because it gives you a sense of what it was like in those at U of C. Does that machine disturb our-

Q: Well I think we'll talk over it.

ALBIN: Okay, I'll do that. But just remind me to lower my voice when the time comes.

She applied for the PhD program in American lit, Twain and late nineteenth century. She wanted to study with Hamlin Hill, whom she revered. Her application, strangely enough, was rejected for the PhD program. Come to find out that the secretary for the English department put all female candidate applications on the bottom of the in-box and made sure they were hidden, because in her view a women's place was in the home, not in the lecture hall or as a research scholar. So Elaine and her female classmates were torpedoed to the bottom of the pile and the slots were filled by the time the committee got to those applications. She bit the bullet and went to library school as I did. She was the victim of horrible prejudice. She retained her love of literature her whole life and a keen sense of quality and creativity.

Anyway, we went back to school for a couple of quarters, maybe the better part of a year, three-quarters, got our degrees. In the meantime, I looked around for jobs.

Q: Before we get to that, let's talk just a bit- I'd like to pick up what was library science like? I mean, what were you learning and looking at today how stood sort of library science? What were courses like?

ALBIN: I've never been a big fan of library science as a discipline. It's a trade, not an academic discipline. By contrast, I'm a big fan of libraries. On the whole, librarianship was a moribund profession in those days before computers and it's even a more so nowadays. Fortunately for readers, for researchers, for scholars and for students at the K through 12 levels, librarians had caught on generally to the fact that they were out of date and had to run really hard to catch up with changing technologies and demographics. Many library schools couldn't play catch up as we transitioned from paper to digital. Many library schools went out of business therefore. University of Chicago's proud Graduate Library School went out of business decades ago. They don't give a degree in library science anymore or even in information science. I will give University of Chicago and its library school credit for recognizing change. In an attempt to keep the School going they hired people to reorient the program into information management. They hired people like Donald Swanson, who was a professor of computer science. But he and his forward-thinking colleagues were unable to stem the tide and keep up fast enough with

the way things were changing. I'll have much more to say about this change when I get to the Library of Congress part of the career. But the library school in those days was still old fashioned and resistant to curriculum change. Elaine was very good at computers. We learned how to program and input on punch cards. We, library school students, had to program from scratch in one or two courses. We programmed using Fortran and COBOL which she understood and I didn't. So she coached me through the required coursework in computers. I was firmly rooted in the paper and print generation and remain so although I'm pretty sophisticated for a guy my age, I think, nowadays but it's not been easy.

The positive side of this time of professional decay was that it was also a time of transition. The beauty of the library career was that it could become anything you wanted it to be. I took advantage of that flexibility.

Much later, the Army changed me and taught me how to come to terms with the machine. But in those days I fought computerization. I realized the future was approaching at speed, but I wanted no part of it. This did not bode well for my future career, of course. However, I was lucky enough to have this training in Arabic, which was a rare and very marketable skill.

In finishing library school I concentrated on books and printing history, taking a couple of courses with Howard Winger, a former department chairman who was a book and cultural historian. I got along with him very well. I admired his research and wanted to emulate him. He was very helpful to me. He passed away many years ago.

The rest of the course of study was required library-like stuff that was passé then and it's pretty passé now. It focused on cataloging and reference work, which I found boring and silly. But I got through the courses and I graduated and so did Elaine.

Now, libraries have changed. I'm a consultant to the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill Library and Information Science School, again because of their need for somebody with Arabic and Middle Eastern background. That's a concentration that they have received some money to develop, and properly so. They received a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. And I helped them spend their money wisely and put my oar in when they have questions about how to shape a program specialty in area studies librarianship. It's a good way of getting with graduate students and faculty who are doing cutting edge kind of work. So I can view the library profession from that vantage. I talk to them frequently, we Skype, sometimes I go down to Chapel Hill and sit in on their meetings. It keeps me up to date and I appreciate that opportunity.

There's no doubt that the internet and associated technologies, digitization for instance, has supplanted library research to a very great degree. I ought to be doing a separate oral history of my library career and the changes I've seen in the past four decades.

Q: Why don't we minimize that but then at the end if you want to, go into.

ALBIN: I shall and I appreciate your patience. To a large degree my international career, which is what you're interested in, is parallel to it because I've spent my entire life with the library in international affairs, one way or another.

So when we graduated I had been applying libraries around the country and not getting much response because they were impecunious then and they're impecunious now; they're forever suffering budget trauma. Most large libraries belong to state-run institutions, whether they're public libraries or academic libraries. They are all hostage to government budget processes and politics. They have a difficult time selling themselves to legislators and running in competition with other budget priorities.

So I didn't get any nibbles and neither did Elaine. One day I was in Cleveland at the Cleveland Public Library (CPL). I stopped by the John G. White Collection of Folklore, Orientalia, and Chess, which served as the library's rare book room. I think Elaine was with me that day; she grew up in Cleveland, as I say, and was a heavy library user as a student but had no connection with the main library downtown since she was a suburban person. We walked into the reading room and gawked around; it was a fancy, ornate room, with mosaics and frescos and all the rich atmosphere of rare book rooms everywhere. John Griswold White was the benefactor of that collection; he set it up with his specialties folklore, Orientalia, and chess in the early 20th century to collect comprehensively in those three areas. I introduced myself to the librarian and I told her that I was a freshly minted librarian looking for a job. I said I was recently returned from Cairo having studied Arabic. All of a sudden she was very interested and she said, "How would you like to work here as your first job?" she asked enthusiastically. We got the paperwork started that very day, and soon afterwards we moved from Chicago to Cleveland, where I worked for a year as Arabic and Persian cataloguer and reference librarian. Elaine found a good job at a suburban library. We enjoyed a wonderful year or so in Cleveland. The job was not taxing, no heavy lifting, no outdoor work. Alice Loranth, the head librarian of the White collection, was the most wonderful woman. She taught me a lot about library politics in a big urban institution, how to keep the budgeteers and other administrators happy, and how to handle the public. All of these were valuable skills and profitable on-the-job training. It was a good seat of the pants education. But it lasted only a year, thank goodness, because the salary was puny. I probably made more money in Baghdad as an English teacher than I earned that year at CPL

Q: Yes.

ALBIN: Now it gets interesting as far as I'm concerned and the miracle happened. A couple of miracles happened at that time.

I applied for a job- because I knew I wasn't going to be staying at Cleveland- I applied at the University of Texas at Austin where they were building their Middle East library collection. I got the job. It was a wonderful job. I went down to Austin for the interview and was wined and dined like a visiting potentate. I was entertained by both the library administration and by the Middle East Studies Center at Austin and we had, Elaine and I,

a marvelous couple of days of interviews and tours. I felt like this would be home. They did everything possible to expedite my decision.

The one bad thing about the decision was that they had no library. I was being hired to build one. They had thousands of books in cartons or piles in a warehouse somewhere in Austin. My job was to make order of the mess and move it to a facility on the central campus. Elaine was also offered a job as part of the recruitment package.

The Middle East studies program had a marvelous faculty. It was ambitious, with funds commensurate with ambition. Austin was a coming institution in those days. They wanted to make a big splash and they needed a good Middle East library to do that.

Q: I would imagine the great spur there would be the oil industry.

ALBIN: Yes, that's very true. But again the- I go back to Alice Loranth at CPL; she was the one that instructed me during my year there that nothing bores administrations more than money for library collections. It's not the first thing on anyone's priority list, least of all on the priority list of the state legislature of Texas. Texas oil money, of course, rolled in and they bankrolled the Harry Ransom Center, the world famous rare book and manuscript collection at UT (University of Texas). They funded an entire building for it and other glitzy enterprises. But for a small Middle Eastern studies collection, or for other area studies libraries like the Far Eastern one or South Asian collection funding was not generous. Latin American studies was an exception. The university put a lot of money into the Latin American collection. But our area studies group of people were always the poor orphans of the library.

Internal politics at the library was really—interesting – and complex. Preparing a budget was a complex process for me and then in turn a complex process for the people who administered the library. Suffice it to say that with the help of the faculty in Middle Eastern studies, notably Professors James Bill, and Paul English we were able to strong-arm the library into funding the Near East collection quite well. We moved into quarters that were commodious and I was able to move out of the warehouse, get the books out of the boxes and off the floor, onto shelves, get them processed adequately and attract a steady clientele from faculty, grad students and even some undergrads, although the collection was entirely in Arabic and Persian, with a smaller Turkish collection. Anyone who touched Middle Eastern studies, at whatever level, used my library. I was really gratified by that. The library became a center, probably *the* center for Middle Eastern conversations, study, research in the university and I was very pleased.

Let me explain that the books that were stored in the warehouse mostly came from Cairo, or Karachi in the case of the Persian books. When the PL480 program was established it obliged the Library of Congress to buy books not only for its own collections but for all research libraries qualified as academic centers for area studies. The Cairo office was sending publications to Berkeley, Harvard, Yale, Ann Arbor, Austin, and maybe a dozen other American universities, Chicago, Wisconsin, the University of Washington and more. The Cairo office supplied current Arabic books, magazines, newspapers and other

media to these university libraries. So instead of buying just one copy for LC the office supplied multiple copies. This had a big impact on the book trade in Egypt and other Arab countries.

Before there was a librarian, the Cairo shipments to the University of Texas wound up in those cartons that the library didn't know what to do with. The faculty wanted desperately to get them organized into a proper space and accessible to users, because people were beginning to do graduate work in the disciplines. It was my job to accomplish this. I stayed for two glorious years, in Austin. My wife and I had a great time, an intellectually stimulating time. We had a great social time too in the vibrant Austin atmosphere.

Q: Well I've had conversations not too long ago with a group of people talking about living in San Antonio and other places who say it's very difficult to come there with a liberal state of mind because it's very conservative.

ALBIN: Perhaps. But in my view, a liberal mind, in your sense, is not the same as an open mind.

Q: Now, the time you were in Texas was when to when?

ALBIN: I was there from 1973 to 1975 for two-plus years.

Q: Okay. Did you run across- I mean you being of course in Austin I mean it's a different world than say San Antonio.

ALBIN: Yes.

Q: What was the intellectual environment?

ALBIN: UT Austin was a very ambitious school and was recruiting very ambitious and top flight, at least in my field, top flight faculty. I'll name some: John Alden Williams; James Bill; Paul English; former diplomat Robert Stookey and many others. My goodness, so many others- Michael Hillmann and Mohammad Ali Jazayery in the strong Persian studies area; Najim Bezirgan in Arabic studies, and I think he also taught Turkish. Very ambitious. That group of people was scattered throughout the departments of the university in oriental languages, in political science, in geography and Bob and Elizabeth Fernea in the anthropology department; outstanding nationally and internationally known people.

Q: How about the student body?

ALBIN: The graduate students that I came in contact with at the library were all doing their work in Arabic or Persian. They were serious about their work, students who could have gone to any university in the country, any university in the world. There were a lot of foreign Arabic-speaking students, very bright, very ambitious. There was another sort

of student too. The university in those days was benefitting a lot from the influx of students financed by their home countries. They came from Saudi Arabia, the Gulf, and Iran. They enrolled in many disciplines. I don't claim that they were the best students in the world but they found current Arabic and Farsi books and magazines in their home languages. It was an unexpected luxury for them, an unexpected pleasure. They added to my user and circulation statistics and that was vital at budget time. But academically speaking I'd say Texas in those days was first class or soon to be first class and I think it maintains that reputation today in Middle Eastern studies.

Q: Okay.

ALBIN: With regard to the political atmosphere if that's what you were getting at-

Q: Yes.

ALBIN: It was- I would say UT in those days was no different from any other American university. The fact that the university was in Texas was not as important as the fact that it was in Austin. The fact that it was in Texas made the budget battles more difficult because the politics as between-

Q: The legislature of Texas is renowned for anti-intellectual-

ALBIN: You put your finger on it. We used to say that Texas is the western-most Arab country. The budget battles were vicious. Fortunately, I was so far down the totem pole that big-time politics didn't bother me. I had to fight like hell for my own budget inside the library administration which had its own brand of anti-intellectualism when it came to all foreign languages except Spanish. The Middle East studies faculty were staunch supporters via the library committee I set up.

Now as far as the politics is concerned, I want to make it clear that I'm a conservative, I'd go back to live in Texas tomorrow, anywhere but Austin. I say that facetiously... I loved the atmosphere of that city but I didn't like its politics nor did I like the politics on campus at the University of Chicago. However there were some saving features at the University of Chicago that there may not have been at UT. There were people at the University of Chicago who were extreme- I mean, I was there in an era where students were chaining themselves to trees and blocking traffic and occupying classrooms, and assaulting teachers. I ignored them if I could. Some of the professors were downright antagonistic to me, one in particular, whose name I won't mention. I brought the same frame of mind to Texas. But in order to survive you keep your mouth shut. How do you think I survived in Washington for so many years?

Q: Yes.

ALBIN: You keep your mouth shut; go along to get along because I understood how the game was played. But nonetheless there were great professors at Texas. So Texas never

bothered me. Washington really never bothered me when I came to work here; I let it slide off my back just like all silly accusations of prejudice of whatever kind.

I considered that my transport from Cleveland to Austin was a miracle. Then the second miracle happened. I was 31 years old when I began at Texas. I mentioned to you earlier my life's dream was to run that office in Cairo that I told you about. I thought that dream might be achievable at the very end of my career, as the capstone. So I worked hard at Austin and I worked hard in the professional community, in the American Library Association and especially in the Middle East Studies Association and the Middle East Librarians Association. I got elected to office and was active on professional committees and was committee chair of this and that. I was twice president of the Middle East Librarians Association and I'm a life member of the Middle East Studies Association. I published pieces in the literature. And I became kind of nationally known on a small scale because of my participation in ALA, the American Library Association and other groups like the American Oriental Society, the oldest surviving scholarly organization in the United States.

I was ready to stay my entire career in Austin. My wife was happy. We didn't have kids at that time. We enjoyed what a very attractive city had to offer and we enjoyed Texas, despite what you call its anti-intellectual cast. The next miracle happened one Friday evening when Elaine and I were having our frugal meal. The phone rang and I went to pick it up. An unfamiliar voice asked for me. He said, "Hello, Mike, this is Dan Boorstin." Do you know who Dan Boorstin was?

Q: Librarian of Congress.

ALBIN: Yes. "This is Dan Boorstin. I'm in town to give the commencement address at the university on Sunday morning and I'd like to interview you for the job in Cairo. Are you free for breakfast tomorrow morning? I'm staying at the university president's house. Come by for breakfast Sunday, if you can." Like I knew where the president's house was! "Yes, I'm free for breakfast on Sunday. What time would you like me to be there?" So I got over there and the interview lasted about 10 minutes. He said, "You're recommended to me because you have a reputation of being a guy who speaks Arabic and I need somebody who speaks Arabic; you are a guy who's upwardly mobile in the profession and I need somebody like that. Are you willing to go to Cairo for two years?" And I said, "Why yes, of course I am." And so he said, "All right, you'll be getting some phone calls from Library people, probably from Frank McGowan. He knows you and recommended to for the job in Cairo. You can work out the details with him. If you can get free of your current job ASAP then we'll get you on a plane to Cairo." And I said, "Yes, sir. I'll make arrangements with the university." So that's what I did. I told Elaine that we were going to Cairo. She says, "Here we go again! I left for Cairo on the day of my wedding and I guess I can pull up stakes again." This time, however, we were not going on a student stipend; we were going to have a nice salary and a nice place to live where cockroaches wouldn't be falling off the ceiling on her face in the middle of the night.

Q: Before we move on what about your collection at the University of Texas; did you-how did you keep up with books being published and you know, I mean getting suitable books?

ALBIN: I'm glad you asked that. It gets to the heart of my favorite job in all of libraryland and that is selecting books; coming across books, knowing what's out there and getting them.

My favorite job at the Library of Congress, and I had some high powered jobs at there over the years, is basically summarized in the two words my colleague, who also had big jobs at the Library, taught me to use when people asked me what I did at LC. It's simple, "Get books"; that was my job: to "get books." At Texas, many if not most of the books came in automatically from the Library's office in Cairo. There was little selection required on my part. I also had to catalogue the books, a job I paid grad students to do.

Q: We're talking University of Texas?

ALBIN: Yes, correct. I had graduate student helpers. I had a budget for the personnel at that level. They did the cataloging so I could do book selection for Persian and Arabic titles not covered by Cairo, such as out-of-print publications and subscriptions to newspapers and magazines. Like any university, UT Austin had specific interests. One of the ways that the Library of Congress office in Cairo saved money was to do no book selection for the individual participating libraries. Every library got exactly the same books: Michigan, Berkeley, Yale, Texas, everybody. So Cairo didn't have to pay a staff to do book selection. Book selection was done by the receiving library, so I got a chance to look at every book arriving from Cairo and there were hundreds if not thousands of books per year. I examined each one to determine whether they were appropriate for our teaching and research interests, because the faculty and graduate students were my clientele. The library paid my salary and I reported to some bureaucrat in the library but the people who really ran my shop were the faculty and the grad students. They were the customers, I had to keep them happy so I selected books with them in mind. Books coming from Cairo that I didn't want -- out they went into the trash. But because of Texas's comprehensive ambitions these discards were few. As far as purchase was concerned, my Persian was very adequate for the purposes of book selection and reference. I poured over book catalogs in Persian. No LC field office covered Iran comprehensively, or the other Persian speaking countries, Afghanistan or Tajikistan. The Library's PL-480 program didn't cover Soviet Central Asia. Iran, though, was a very important country for our teaching and research so I spent a lot of time selecting Persian books with the help of the Persian faculty, Jazayeri and Hillmann. There have been many changes to Cairo operations since then. I'll get into that later. Appraising every single book fed the book disease that I mentioned earlier. Being a bibliaddict was major qualification of my job.

Q: Did you get involved at all in the selection of books in Arabic that really should be translated into English and vice versa of English books that should be translated? Or who did that?

ALBIN: University libraries aren't in that business. It's not their job.

Q: Where do they get it?

ALBIN: If it's there, they get it. And if a faculty member in Arabic lit or Persian lit is working on a given author and wants to translate a book into English he's free to do so as an academic and business enterprise. He gets a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities for example and goes ahead and translates book. Then he looks around a publisher, oftentimes a university press. That's what happened with Naguib Mahfouz and many other Arab and Iranian authors. AUC (American University in Cairo) Press has excelled at this business. There are some people associated with their Arabic studies faculty, either as full professors or as adjunct professors or as hangers-on who are first class translators of Arabic lit. Many have done a marvelous job. AUC Press has done an important job bringing out in English significant Arab and especially Egyptian authors. I can't say enough about their work. I think Syracuse University Press comes to mind and the University of Washington Press are others active in the field. Sometimes commercial presses publish translations. But it's never the university library's job, nor LC's.

Now we're getting into State Department's cultural area with the famous Franklin book program and its erstwhile successors. I could go on all day, Stu, about the amateurish way that State has handled translations into Arabic or Persian. It is a scandal, one of many Department of State scandals. You've heard me go on about USAID. Well USAID is only one part of our country's public diplomacy debacle.

Q: Well why, I mean we're moving a bit off of-

ALBIN: Yes.

Q:-this other thing; on this thing why do you feel that our- the Franklin Press, which was based out of Beirut at one time and then moved over to Cairo, didn't it, or-?

ALBIN: Yes. At one point or other both of those posts had a hand in it.

Q: But why do you feel that the books figured for translation into Arabic are poorly chosen?

ALBIN: No, no, no. Not that they were poorly chosen. I have no criticism of what was chosen for the program and the Franklin book program should stand as a model of what we should be doing today. Why in the world aren't we publishing books in English now? Why did Franklin go out of business?

Q: We're not doing that?

ALBIN: Hell no. I'll tell you something. There are many things the Department of State does wrong but one of the things that they do wrongest is cultural diplomacy or public

diplomacy. I was at a lecture last night. The lecturer, an academic, said what State Department must do is get wise about foreign cultures, get wise about presenting ourselves overseas. Somebody raised a hand and commented that he has watched the United States thumb its nose and abandon programs, on-air media programs, television and radio, to the point where now we have skeleton media presence. What's left is mish-mash of media in Arabic: Radio Sawa; Alhurra TV; Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Overlapping programs with confusing identities which by all accounts few Arabs listen to. He said the U.S. has abandoned the field to hate-filled anti-American al-Jazeera and RT-TV (Radio-TV Russia).

Just this week the Russian RT had an eight-page supplement in the local papers, the Post and the Times touting all of the ways Russia is reaching the American audience. Compare that to what we, the US, are doing. It is small potatoes compared to RT and al-Jazeera. Not to mention the professionalism and wide reach of BBC and Monte Carlo.

When I eat my breakfast in the morning listen to Radio Sawa, BBC Arabic, and Arab TV and radio. This morning I listened to the Sunni station, Al Baghdadiyah, while I'm eating my Cheerios. Let's just keep it to the international stations: BBC; Sawa; Alhurra; Radio Monte Carlo; RT, which I sometimes watch on my television and Jazeera. I watch or listen to all of them in Arabic except RT, which I watch in English.

Content-wise Radio Sawa and Alhurra, are a match for any one of these government international stations. Their content is superb, but they make a couple of big mistakes. First, they are not on the air 24/7. Second, their programming is often sophomoric. The guy at the lecture last night wondered how Radio Sawa can attract an Arab audience when it plays jejune teen-age pop tunes most of the time. It's not surprising listenership in Iraq is low. I'd like to see some statistics on this.

Okay, so that's my riff on media for the time being. So we'll get back to translations. Not a day goes by but that don't I make the acquaintance of an Arab or Arab-American. When I introduce myself as being a librarian they shake my hand extra vigorously. They hear the word 'library' and they immediately begin to tell me of their fond memories of the American USIS libraries in Cairo, or Baghdad, or Casablanca, or Damascus. How they spent their formative years in these libraries reading, meeting friends for movies, doing their homework. Hundreds, thousands, of young Arabs were influenced positively by our libraries. Now these institutions are shuttered. You can blame Bush. Or you can blame Congress. You can blame any number of people. I blame State itself because nobody stood up for American libraries overseas, least of all the Department of State. I also blame its partner in crime the American Library Association. I tried unsuccessfully for a couple of decades, until I finally gave up, to get the American Library Association to lobby for the restoration of the American Center libraries. It was a lost cause.

Q: Yes.

ALBIN: So anyway.

Q: Well there we are.

ALBIN: There we are.

Q: Okay. I'm just looking at the time; it's probably a good place to stop. We're going to pick this up when you got to Cairo. When did you get to Cairo?

ALBIN: September of 1975.

Q: Okay. Let's talk- I mean the next time around we'll talk about both what you were doing but also your read of the political situation and-

ALBIN: It's at this point that I get involved with the embassy.

Q: Yes. And just- because I want to use you as somebody who was outside the hallowed halls of the embassy.

ALBIN: Yes. Gladly.

Q: You know what I mean. In other words-

ALBIN: I know what you mean.

Q: -it's a different perspective and I think it's an important perspective.

ALBIN: Yes.

Q: So how's-

You were going to tell me a story about-

ALBIN: About social media and the evaluation of the importance of social media in the current environment of turmoil in the Middle East. Academics, journalists, media people of all kinds, Department of State, DoD (Department of Defense) analysts; everybody is spun up about social media.

I heard an interesting story at dinner last week from an Iranian person who participated in the anti-government or anti-election demonstrations in Tehran in 2009.

Q: Yes.

ALBIN: We got onto the subject of social media. One of the people at the table asked an Iranian recently returned from Iran if she had been in constant touch with the other people on the streets there in Tehran in 2009. She said she hadn't. She said the government cut off Facebook and Twitter. She said she couldn't get any news except on

CNN by satellite. Sometimes they would neglect to turn off the satellites, the government that is, and she received whatever she could get from CNN, BBC, or VOA (Radio Farda). In other words, she had to go to the foreign broadcast sites on her mobile phone. "Social media meant nothing to us in the 2009 demonstrations at election time," she said. From what we read, much the same thing is happening during street unrest in Egypt and Turkey.

Q: Yes.

Q: OK. Well, today is the 24th of May, 2013 with Mike Albin. And we're talking about the time you were in Cairo.

ALBIN: Yes, with the Library of Congress.

Q: You were in Cairo for how long?

ALBIN: With the Library of Congress, beginning in 1975, I stayed until 1985.

Q: We'll talk about the '75 to '85 period.

ALBIN: Let's do that.

Q: This was -- Nasser had gone, is that right?

ALBIN: Yes, correct. Nasser died in 1970.

Q: So was Sadat there for part of it, or?

ALBIN: Sadat was there for all of it and I was there for all of it, all of the Sadat era, from '75, that is to say. He was assassinated in 1981, if you recall, and was succeeded by Mubarak.

Q: OK.

ALBIN: About Sadat's assassination and my reaction. My family and I were at the embassy vacation villa, the Pathay House, in Alexandria for a little getaway. That evening, after the siesta, I drove downtown to call at some bookstores. I had the car windows down as I inched along in traffic. I had the radio on to a local station, but all I could get was army music. I knew the president had been killed because I heard the news on BBC before leaving Pathay House. The news had not been announced on Egyptian radio yet, so I presumed nobody in the adjacent cars had heard the news. I was not inclined to poke my head out the window to share the information with my fellow drivers at stoplights or traffic jams.

Q: Yeah.

ALBIN: Taxi drivers mostly. Khalid Islambouli was the trigger puller. A nasty guy whose brother, by the way, was also involved in jihadist activities from what I recall, but I'd have to go to my written notes to jog my memory. His brother was in jail at the time for extremist activities. Sadat was not averse to throwing people in jail, any more than Mubarak was, or Nasser for that matter. And Khalid's brother had been identified as a danger to the regime. I'll digress for a moment and return to my trade as librarian. In librarianship there is research tool called the authority file. The authority file allows you, the reader, to find the object of your search in a large catalogue. It works like this. If you want to find books by Mark Twain you can search on Twain or Clemens to find his books. Regardless of the name on the title page of the book you, the user, can walk into the library or use the computer to find what you're looking for by trying any pseudonym. What ties the names together is the authority file. If the Egyptian police had had such a tool, they would have had an authority file on the Islambouli family, even though Khalid's brother didn't bear the same last name. I'd have to go to my notes to recollect his brother's full name. As you know, the naming systems in the Middle East are different from ours.

Q: It's actually Charles.

ALBIN: That's right. So Charles Kennedy. If I were looking for a book by Charles Kennedy, I wouldn't come to you unless I had the benefit of the authority file. You would be listed under Kennedy, comma, Stu, Stuart, Charles Stuart Kennedy, and so forth. A variety of names. Well, similarly, the brother wasn't named Islambouli. He probably took his father's first name as his surname. That's a common practice. The patronymic would have been let's say Ahmed. He would have been Mohammad Ahmed, with no Islambouli because for some reason Khalid decided to take that as a final name, or family name. So Khalid the assassin team leader wasn't connected to his brother in any way. He was allowed to enlist in the army. He was assigned soldier tasks and eventually carried a loaded weapon into the ceremony and with his confederates opened fire on the presidential reviewing stand. Mubarak, by the way, was standing right next to Sadat as were many other dignitaries. That's my recollection as it eventually appeared on TV.

Q: While you were there, let's say before the assassination, the Muslim Brotherhood was well known. I mean it, you know, but was there any -- I mean were there --

ALBIN: He, by the way, Khalid Islambouli was not a Muslim Brother.

Q: Oh. All right. Well, let's say extremists of all --

ALBIN: Yes.

Q: Any connection -- did it touch upon your work or your knowledge?

ALBIN: Yes. Only at a very -- at a distance, at arm's length. My job in Cairo was to collect publications, Egyptian publications and publications from every Arab country. If

posters, pamphlets or brochures came out during elections, for example, political campaign material or political protest material or placards or wall posters or anything of that kind, anything that could be considered a publication, my job was to collect it for the Library. So we collected labor union protest material and political material of all political parties and stripes. If there happened to be an election or some sort of event in Alexandria or in Upper Egypt, I would send a staff member to get that material. That was the technique throughout the region. If I happened to be in Tunis or Morocco or Syria and there was some event of public interest that generated what we called gray literature, I'd pick it up. As time went on over that 10-year or so period, I identified book agents or collecting agents in each one of the Arab countries, Turkey, and Malta. Those people worked with me on contract, they were not FSNs. Part of their assignment was to pick up gray lit.

Q: Did this cause any problem? All the states that you mentioned, except maybe Turkey and Malta, were run by well, military?

ALBIN: Yes.

Q: In those days. And strikes and all usually I guess were forbidden.

ALBIN: Generally speaking, but that didn't --

Q: Well anyway, collecting this material I think would have raised, if not eyebrows, hackles on the part of the powers that be. I mean did you have problems?

ALBIN: No, because I did it subtly and nobody knew what we were doing. Let's take an example. There was a student protest in, let's say in Morocco when I was on a collecting trip there. I'd go down to the site if reasonably safe. I never put myself in danger or was conspicuous. If it was just people marching through the main street of Casablanca, I'd pick up their stuff and send it back to the Library through our office in Cairo. When Sadat removed Nasser's restraints on political parties our staff in the Cairo office did a hell of a good job picking up all the election materials, from every party. We covered the country from Upper to Lower Egypt picking up candidate materials, political party literature, that sort of thing. As you intimate, disruptions or elections under the military regimes weren't frequent. They were quickly squelched. But sometimes they were licensed and people were allowed to march a little bit. Unions, labor unions were vocal, students were vocal so we would try to pick up their literature.

Q: OK. What was the ultimate purpose of collecting these things? I mean I would think that the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) would obviously be interested in picking up any names or movements or something. But would they be -- would there -- can I go and say, "I'd like to see Moroccan student protest pamphlets?"

ALBIN: I wouldn't go to the university campus in Rabat.

Q: No, no, no, no. I mean back in Washington.

ALBIN: Well, let me get to that in a moment. I'll discuss that. I was part of the country team during those 10 years because I was an agency head, even though I was Legislative Branch. So the ambassadors always invited me to the meetings with the other heads. My office was open to anyone who wanted to look at the material before we shipped it. I announced that such and such was available. When elections became open and legal in Egypt, parties published their own newspapers, platforms, and pamphlets. My confreres knew that we had material and we would discuss it, if the ambassador was of a mind. I don't remember cases where they visited my office, because in those days it was not in the embassy compound in Garden City. It was about a 10-minute walk away from the embassy. I don't remember anybody actually coming over to look go through it, but certainly conversationally and in meetings such as the country team they knew it was there. Most officers couldn't read Arabic that well anyway.

If I can digress a little bit. Very few of us at the Library of Congress in Washington had TS (top secret) clearances. And I had one as did all of the field directors, directors of the other offices.

Q: TS is top secret.

ALBIN: Top secret clearance. Because of our access to chancellery and country team meetings and frequent travel to other countries. So when I returned to Washington for good in 1985, I carried that clearance with me. The Library continued to see that it was renewed because one of my side jobs back home was to represent the Library on various Agency committees and working groups related to the gray literature collecting effort.

Let me go into this for a moment. In those days, the '70s and '80s, State, NGA -- what is today the National Geospatial Agency -- and other such outfits had collecting programs overseas. This was in the days before the computer or easy international telecoms. One of my jobs when I was in the field, in Cairo, was to always get as many maps as possible for the NGA and for State Department's Publications Procurement Office, which was really not a State Department operation at all. I was always on the lookout for maps of all kinds. That stuff went to Washington. People from those agencies had access to it through a special office called the Federal Research Division at LC. When I returned for permanent assignment I sat in these meetings, in these CIA meetings for gray literature and for maps, et cetera, and helped design the collecting requirements for the different agencies and overseas regions. It was basically what I had done in Cairo, to collect political material, maps, photographs, industrial material at trade fairs, etc. What do I mean by photographs? I mean, for example, in every country I would try, with mixed success, to go to the cadastral office to buy photographs of cities or neighborhoods, and so forth. Sometimes the photos were open to the public and I could have copies made and pay for them. Many times they were not open to the public and I was dissed by the clerk. I didn't have much luck in most of countries although I succeeded in Egypt during the Infitah, Sadat's open door liberalization era. Relations were good between the United States and Egypt, and my access to offices such as the Cadastral Office or the Statistical Office were quite good. I don't want to overemphasize what was a very secondary element of my job.

I was never directly tasked in these areas. The Legislative Branch was very jealous of its independence from the Executive, and the Library was always keen to stay clear of anything that is not research or scholar-focused. Ambassadors and embassy colleagues knew and respected this distinction.

Q: I'm just thinking, who uses this back in the States?

ALBIN: Analysts and other researchers. Don't forget, this was in the age of print, nothing was in digits.

Let's go back -- let's start in 1985 when I moved back to Washington for good. At the CIA's Reston office there was a committee on gray literature which met more or less frequently, I don't remember now how frequently. Maybe once every two weeks maybe once a month, something like that. I'd drive out to Reston from the Library. The committee had representatives from all kinds of agencies. We would help design collecting requirements, which would be sent to the field for action. One of my responsibilities was to take the requirements back to the Library, mostly to the SciTech Division. A couple of people there had the appropriate clearance to work with subjects like the nuclear or chemical industries around the world. They would task me to go out to the CIA meetings and transmit Library of Congress's input. We never collected anything secret. That was why we called it "gray." It was published openly but not commercially. It was tough material to learn about and acquire. Let me give an example.

Let's say I'm in Riyadh, at the Institute of Public Administration (IPA) looking for its publications. That was a frequent stop whenever I was in Saudi Arabia. I would go into an office to chat with the director or maybe just a functionary. I would survey the shelves of books, pamphlets and studies, selecting what was on my list of subjects in the social or physical sciences. I would pick up the Kingdom's statistical abstract or a study of engineering schools in the country. I'd continue our chat, asking about updates or even older editions. Perhaps he'd have mimeographed publications, or volumes that had been Xeroxed, not real publications but not secret files either. "Oh, here's population census of the Eastern Province from last year. May I have it?" So what if it's a little out-of-date, who's got figures for the Eastern Province? Well, now I do. I'd ask for figures for other provinces. I'd put all these materials in my briefcase finish my coffee and Bob's your uncle. I did that on all my trips.

My job was not to figure out if the figures or reports were accurate. That was the job of the end user. My job was to 'get stuff.' That was one of the ways I did it.

Q: Oh boy.

ALBIN: Another thing: I was able to read what was on the title page of the publications and I don't think most a State Department procurement officers were able to do that, unless they were FSNs. Many State people simply sent drivers out to do the work. Not very professional or thorough, it seems to me.

Q: Was the library sort of the meeting place of -- I won't say dissident students, but of students who were trying to get, you know, a view of the world outside of Egypt and all?

ALBIN: Let stress that our overseas offices are not libraries. We are collecting offices.

Q: Ah.

ALBIN: So the American Center Library -- remember American Centers? I think we've talked about American Centers.

Q: Yes, we did.

ALBIN: A wonderful institution. And we won't digress into that, I think we talked about it last time. Anyway, the American Center Library, the American Cultural Center, whatever they called it was the focus for that kind of thing. I had a different mission, in many ways very personal. I liked books. I was also an Arabist and very interested in Egypt, its history and culture. I liked Egyptians and wasn't afraid of them. I notice that many official Americans don't like the locals and don't want much to do with them. They do their souvenir shopping and their business appointments, and that's about it. There were some few of us Americans at the embassy in Cairo or other embassies that I visited in the course of my work who were really fascinated by the country that they were posted to. They really got into Tunis or Sana'a, or wherever. There were even people who liked Saudi Arabia. I never did. That's probably the only country I never really liked very much. I got along just fine with such officers and we traded contacts. Because of my Arabic and because Library of Congress had a certain cache, I was in constant social contact with the literati, journalists, government officials, authors, painters, academics those people who would tend to be more liberal. I was in constant demand when I visited other countries too, because I represented the Library of Congress, an institution which enjoyed universal admiration. Among the intelligentsia, mine was the widest circle imaginable, especially in Cairo where I spent most of my time.

Q: What sort of flavor were you getting? This was during a military dictatorship. What were you getting in this circle?

ALBIN: Mixed, mixed feeling about Egypt's old regime that is under the monarchy that ended in 1952. Mixed feeling about Nasser, mixed feeling about Sadat up to the time that I left in '85. The feeling among the intelligentsia, the reading public, the painting public, the theater going public, the movie going public, the journalistic public, was liberal, generally disdainful of America and unappreciative of US economic assistance, resignedly tolerant of the peace with Israel. The tone was not much different from what we witness in the Arab Spring. When our media speaks of secularists and liberals I know exactly who they're talking about. I know some of them personally -- the older generation, that is to say. Some of them have passed away, many of them in fact. But I knew a lot of them. I can guess what they're thinking. They don't like the instability that the Arab Spring has generated. They want to participate, but they don't know how, thus

leaving the field open to youth on one side and the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamists on the other. It was no different in those days. There was no unanimity among that class of people about how to effectively oppose Sadat or Mubarak. I knew dyed in the wool leftists, everything short of bomb throwers, to people who actually supported the regime, who were pro-Sadat, especially after Sadat's Open Door policy, which brought in a little more entrepreneurial fresh air, intellectual entrepreneurship, freedom of the press, freedom to make movies with social themes. From that point of view the country seemed about to blossom. Politically and economically that class of people would have been considered probably center-left. They liked the idea of socialism, but they didn't like the idea of military dictatorship. I don't know -- frankly, I myself don't know any other kind of socialism except forcibly imposed socialism. But anyway, they were comfortable with Sadat's Open Door. They were certainly comfortable with his suppression of radical extremists like the people who eventually assassinated him, although they opposed his openness to what they called Saudi infiltration and propaganda. This class was by and large non-devout Muslims. The Copts were part of this class as well. They tended to be fans of the old regime, that is of the old monarchical regime, -- not because they loved King Farouk, but rather because there were many strong Wafdists among them. The Wafd was a political party that developed strong roots in the Egyptian political psyche after World War I as a nationalist movement, as a non-violent nationalist movement. The party was very important and became a target for Nasser. One of the bellwethers of Sadat's intentions toward open politics during his open door era, the Infitah, was his treatment of the Wafd. He allowed them back into business, allowing their newspaper to be published again. He allowed their spokesmen a place in the public forum. They were still renegades. They weren't favored by the regime, but they were no longer repressed, at least for a period. They were, after all, a minority party with no mass support and provoked no threats to the dictatorship. And I think moving into the Mubarak period, after Sadat's assassination, if I recall correctly that approach was sustained.

Let me say here that there were groups I had little or no contact with, including the Muslim Brotherhood. I knew lots of members individually, some of them were prominent in the book business. I didn't know many university students, except those at the Cairo University library school. And I didn't know any workers and peasants, like some of my anthropologist friends did. What I knew of all these groups came from the state-controlled press and leftist friends.

Q: You know, something that has always struck me was -- the figure I'm told that if you take the whole Islamic world, what one would call the Islamic world, and take petroleum out of the equation --

ALBIN: *(laughs)*

Q: -- their net exports, sort of commercial worldwide equivalent exports are equivalent to that of Finland.

ALBIN: Yes, for 300 million people in 23 countries?

Q: Yeah, I mean, you know, did you see anything -- I mean because we look at Asia as, you know, their real entrepreneurial things. Well hell, when you get into the Middle East you've got the top of the class, sort of the Phoenician, the Jews, the Palestinians and all. I mean great entrepreneurs, but they don't produce anything!

ALBIN: They don't, they don't produce a damn thing. They produce cars that don't run, matches that don't light, light bulbs that burn out the first time you throw the switch. I'm talking about Egyptian industry, not the licensed European companies operating in the Arab World.

Q: I mean what -- you know, looking at this thing --

ALBIN: I agree with you, Stu.

Q: -- what's the problem?

ALBIN: Well, you're asking me to digress from my memoirs and go into political and cultural areas.

Q: Well, I -- it's more than that. It's more you were an observer and an American observer and other people can have other ideas, but you were there, you spoke the language.

ALBIN: Yeah.

Q: You had plenty of time there.

ALBIN: This problem of entrepreneurial spirit is critical. As recently as lunch yesterday I had a conversation with an American who spent nine years in the Green Zone and had pretty impressive experience with the Iraqi elite. I tip my hat to him. The distillate of his observations, as is mine, is that -- let's use the Iraqis as representative of all Arabs for the sake of argument -- what the Iraqis need is sustained exposure to deep-rooted internalization of an entrepreneurial spirit. There's not a risk-taking bone in their bodies. At least as far as business is concerned. They don't know how money works.

The people who control the oil wealth for the Saudis and the Qataris and the Gulfis are foreigners, Europeans and Americans. The emirs and sheikhs would lose their positions at the first sign of Arab Spring in their countries. Iraq is a good example. Billions pour in from oil, but look at how the leaders have wasted and pilfered the money. As the banker friend of mine told me years ago in the 1960s, the worst thing that ever happened to Iraq was the discovery of oil. Iraq is what social scientists call a rentier state, pocketing wealth not producing it. They've won nature's resource lottery.

Q: Yeah.

ALBIN: A cash crop which they themselves sow not but only reap.

I digress now to finish a topic from yesterday. We Americans could offer the Iraqis and all Arabs, a great dose of personal interaction in order to encourage an entrepreneurial frame of mind. I don't mean simply an MBA (Master of Business Administration) but access to our universities in every discipline from chemistry and the hard sciences, the social sciences and the humanities. Just bring these people over here for the MA's (master of arts), BA's (bachelor of arts), even their high school experiences. Whether they go back and love the United States or hate the United States, they will have been educated in a way they could *never* duplicate in their own countries.

Q: I talked to somebody who was involved in training Egyptian military.

ALBIN: Mm-hmm.

Q: And was saying a fundamental difference, he would say -- we're talking about -- it could be artillery, it could be anything, but let's say artillery, how to operate a complicated artillery system and all.

ALBIN: Mm-hmm.

Q: Well, the normal thing is you train Major X how to do this. Major X then gets six or seven bright captains and trains them and they train down the line. So that in Egypt, for example, but this is true for some of the other countries, you train Major X, he's not going to train anybody --

ALBIN: (laughs)

Q: -- because the fact that he knows how to operate this system and all, and maybe direct it, gives him power. And it's his personal power that he's not going to dissipate. I --

ALBIN: He's not going to distribute that power. He's not going to let it go. I'm sorry to hear that story from your military colleague. I have no experience with the Egyptian military, except conversations with our attaches at the embassy in Cairo. I will talk more about this when we get to my assignments in Iraq during OIF (Operation Iraqi Freedom).

Q: Well, did you see any discernible effect on the part of how things happened by Egyptian students going to the United States, getting educated, and coming back? Or were there many?

ALBIN: I would say with regard to Egyptian-U.S. relations, we were in fat city. I think students were coming over here all the time. I would interview Fulbright candidates. I would review all of their applications and when it was time for final selection I would talk to them again. After Camp David our relations with Egypt were very positive. Egyptians, students and professionals, came here on a variety of programs. I sat on embassy cultural committees where we reviewed Fulbright and USAID educational

priorities and applications. Occasionally the ambassador would ask me to participate in this or that cultural activity, which I gladly did. The local Fulbright office was a busy place. I sat on its committees and reviewed applications. There was a great yearning for an American education. I don't remember the statistics or budget figures, but I recall a lot of optimism in cultural exchanges. Lots of American outfits participated in giving Egyptians an American experience, AUC, ARCE, AmCham (American Chamber of Commerce), Rotary International, NAMRU (Naval Medical Research Unit) are all examples. Of course, DOD had its programs that I knew nothing about.

Q: But how did -- did you see any effect of American know-how or whatever it is?

ALBIN: Well, let me give you an example of a program that worked. Mine. I had an office of 30-to-40 Egyptian FSNs. I was the only American, everyone else was an FSN, a Foreign Service National. Today they're called Locally Hired Employees, or something like that. The FSNs included everyone from the coffee guy, the janitor, to highly trained professional librarians. We even employed the Chairman of the Department of Library Science at Cairo University. All were dedicated to their jobs and were proud to work for the Library of Congress. They were open and receptive to new techniques and procedures. I have already described our budget situation. For several years we used US-owned Egyptian currency so I had no wherewithal to send people to the United States for training at the Library. However, sometimes there was enough money to arrange training trips for Library specialists to make the rounds of the field offices or to send one or two of our professionals to our large office in New Delhi for a week or two of specialized training in cataloguing. The senior staff, senior cataloguer, and the consultant from the Cairo University Library School were fluent in English. They received training materials and manuals from the Library in Washington. We did a lot of OJT (On the Job Training). It was very effective. The offices still uses these expedients to keep current in the changing technological environment. The Library of Congress, because of its reputation and the goodwill of its local employees has had a fundamental impact on libraries in the country. Many staff members were active in the Cairo library field and would transmit ideas and training and new developments informally to their colleagues at the National Library and the university libraries.

Q: You know, something I observed, and this is in Europe, the libraries like museums are really not very friendly to the public.

ALBIN: Mm-hmm.

Q: I mean museums seem to be -- I mean I'm talking -- there's a -- there's a gap. Today it may be quite different. But up to my time when I left in 1980, museums were places where -- the plaything of professors, where they could store their stuff.

ALBIN: (laughs)

Q: And they were really stored to display their stuff. But there was not much in the way of interaction or anything else. The library -- the museums were, were closed on weekends

for the benefit of the staff. I mean for God's sakes, I mean, you know. But I mean this is Italy and other places I've seen.

ALBIN: Yes.

*Q: And I would assume -- and when I talk about it -- libraries did not seem to be like the -
- any of the Carnegie Libraries --*

ALBIN: Yes.

Q: You know, open to all and you really enjoy it and you can browse through the books. Libraries were, again, sort of a plaything of the academics almost.

ALBIN: Yep.

Q: How stood library-ship in the Arab World?

ALBIN: Well, OK. How stood librarianship in the Arab World?

Q: And library use.

ALBIN: Let me just preface this by saying the American Center Library in Cairo was in my recollection jam packed most of the time and very much different from what you're talking about. One of the reasons it was so popular was that no other library in Cairo, or in Egypt, came close to offering the welcoming atmosphere or level of service of the American Center. Of course that's all gone now, as we discussed.

Q: That's what I'm saying.

ALBIN: Oh, OK, that's what your point is. Then all I can say is if it was true in Italy, is true in spades in Egypt.

Q: Yeah, I mean, you know, it's a real shocker. What we have developed here through public policy and philanthropy -- I refer of course to Carnegie, which I think he -- boy did he leave a debt to the United States.

ALBIN: He did.

Q: And England too.

ALBIN: Yes.

Q: Or Great Britain.

ALBIN: Mm-hmm, yes.

Q: But --

ALBIN: The problems in Egypt in the education sphere, let's include libraries in this, are vast, and deep. The needs are great because the multitude of people being born and needing education is so overwhelming that the system can't accommodate all the millions of kids who need schooling and libraries. For one thing, the problems are so vast that the newly trained librarians and the older generation of library leaders and administrators are overwhelmed. Secondly, libraries are probably the lowest priority in education and culture budgets. It's very hard to see any forward progress in face of this massive need. I assume the same is true of most areas in educational field. Speaking for librarians, I'll say the situation is desperate. Now, Mrs. Mubarak, Susan Mubarak, the wife of the deposed president, was a huge supporter of libraries. She very active with libraries in general and very close to the Library of Congress. She was a great friend of James Billington, the Librarian of Congress, she was a great friend of the children's literature person, Sybille Jagusch. She knew a lot of people at the technical level and at the supervisory and at the administrative level at the Library. She campaigned for public libraries in Egypt. After I left in 1985 I lost track of her activities because in my Washington jobs I couldn't pay much attention to the Middle East. But I know that Mrs. Mubarak continued to be an enthusiast. Nowadays in the current chaos I don't know what's going on.

Q: Let me stop for just one second. OK.

ALBIN: One of the big misunderstandings about the Library of Congress in the region was that we were not a foreign assistance agency. We were in business for ourselves, to increase our coverage of Arabic language material for the Library and for our thirty-odd participating academic libraries which reimbursed us for what we sent them. We were not in the business of supplying books, personnel, or training to Arab libraries. Addressing that issue was always a delicate part of my job. And I tried to compensate for that negative answer by cooperating closely with the USIS (United States Information Service) personnel, and the cultural affairs officers wherever I went.

Q: Well, was any part of our government apparatuses working to increase libraries or making them more useful?

ALBIN: I don't recall anything dramatic. USAID (United States Agency for International Development) didn't have much interest in libraries. They had funding for education and textbooks, but nothing for personnel development in the library field as I recall. Ambassadors to Egypt may have been susceptible to the blandishments of Mrs. Mubarak, but I don't recall anything major.

Q: Yeah.

ALBIN: But that was on a personal rather than a sustained programmatic level. USIS librarians, the PAO's (public affairs officers), CAO's (cultural affairs officers) talked a good game, but I don't think they had much influence. As to Fulbright, I don't remember

one single librarian making it through the selection process, even though I always voted for them in the review committee when their applications were in front of us.

Q: You know Mike, as we're talking here, and this is 2013, somebody reading this in the next decade or decades, I mean they'll be saying, you know, these are two guys talking about developments of clipper ships. I mean because we're talking -- we're just on the cusp, this period we're talking about, and then up to 1980's, of before the internet really came.

ALBIN: Yep.

Q: And I found that in my own dealings and all the internet, I mean it's in a way some of those techniques are still the same, and somebody's got to put the stuff in. But a kid today can be sitting in Tashkent and tickle the keys and get a lot of the information that before he couldn't get to collaborate. So I mean, I mean it is a different world. Looking at it at that time, was there any thought to this coming along, or was -- I mean was the internet a gleam in the eye of librarians, or?

ALBIN: I would suspect that by the time I left Cairo none of these miracles had been thought of. In 1985, we were lucky to have a fax machine in the office, and my secretary had a Wang word processor on which we were testing the input of bibliographic data. We were lucky to be able to make a telephone call across town, because the phone connections in the city had disintegrated. The most advanced thinking we did was to negotiate with the foreign oil service companies to acquire their non-proprietary mapping on floppy discs for transmittal to our Geography and Map Division. I talked to the oil service companies and the exploration companies about ways to get their digits on discs compatible at the Library. But sadly nobody had the technology to do it. So we explored the satellite technology. We didn't get very far with that either by the time I left in '85.

Q: Yeah.

ALBIN: When I went back on rehired annuitant status in 2007 for a few months to take over my old job, the internet was a reality in Cairo by then. I marveled at the advances the office had made since I'd left, 22 years earlier. The two worlds as you say, were *completely* different, as though there had been a brand new Creation and the Almighty created things He never thought of the first time round. Most importantly, the Egyptians themselves were grasping the advantages of the internet, both professionally and for entertainment and social communication -- everybody carried *the phone*.

Q: Yeah.

ALBIN: Everybody had a terminal. Everybody was connected in one way or another. Those days of no telephone connections or data transfer were over. There's nothing that's not possible now technologically. The impediments now are bureaucratic and human.

Q: Sure.

ALBIN: For example, here is a favorite topic of mine of late. When I was in Iraq in 2010 I was based in Ramadi. I worked closely with the public affairs officer of the PRT, the provincial reconstruction team covering in Anbar Province. He was a wonderful guy, very active. Gabriel Hons-Olivier was his name. He was one of the bright spots in building relationships with the Iraqis, it seemed to me. Hard-working, knowledgeable, good hearted. His only weakness was that he didn't have any Arabic. Other than that he was a -- in my view -- a perfect representative of the United States in the public diplomacy realm. He and I hit it off well and we worked hard in two sectors, English teaching, and libraries. We were able to meet Iraqis interested in these two fields, showing them how to fill out applications for Fulbright or IVLP (International Visitors Leadership Program). One of the things I noticed was that everyone in Anbar thirsts for English. Neither the US nor the UK provides sufficient English language instruction. The question was how to improve the situation.

Here I refer to President Obama's speech yesterday on foreign affairs, which I read thoroughly. Very important speech. One of the things he mentioned, while not tagging public diplomacy directly was that all the elements of the American government must enter into the effort to undermine extremism -- Islamic extremism by means of economic and cultural improvement in the countries. He didn't actually go so far as to mention nation building. He was very careful to avoid that term. He hinted at it by saying we must "recruit all the resources in government." Well, one of these resources, and it is valued above all things, is the English language. We can't move around freely as we once did in Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen, or Afghanistan. Still, we need a massive English teaching effort to influence these countries, as Obama pointed out. How can we overcome the very real security fears? What we need is widespread, imaginative use of the Internet to deliver English instruction at all levels of schooling. So Gabriel and I developed the idea of using the Internet to reach every school kid, every university student, every candidate for Fulbright or other US travel program. It would be simple to incorporate English by satellite to every school in Anbar, for example. Or, if this is not possible, to get it into the American Corners at the five public libraries in the province.

Let's take the Fulbright Program, for example. We can't send American Fulbright TESOL instructors, (teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, TESOL, or TEFL), to such countries as Iraq because it's too dangerous. But we can award Fulbright teaching fellowships to professors at Kansas University or Shenandoah University or the University of Missouri or wherever there are strengths in this field. They would teach from home, without ever going to Iraq. The same is true of Afghanistan or any other country where movement is semi- or non-permissive. I myself am a Fulbright awardee to Iraq, but the embassy refused to let me take up the position. The way to jump over this hurdle is to introduce the use of satellite or Skype.

I have contacted State Department people on a number of occasions in the past two years with this suggestion, but always get the cold shoulder. The Bureau of Education Cultural Affairs (BCA) has been most unresponsive. *Nobody* will listen. Nobody's really interested in teaching English to Iraqis in this innovative way. They all *say* they're interested in teaching English to Iraqis, but they aren't really. Because it's too much

trouble. They have to rethink existing programs and try new ways of doing things. State isn't very good at change. I had lunch about a month ago with three State Department people from BCA. "Oh, we are already are doing that," they claimed. The reality is they are not doing it.

"Well, I just came back from two years in Baghdad," says the lady across the table from me.

"Well, what did you do in Baghdad?"

"Well, I identified programs, I designed programs, I did this, I did that."

"Well, where are those programs in Anbar or anywhere else in Iraq? I was in Anbar and elsewhere for almost two years, but I never saw any such programs or even heard of any of them, and neither did the PRT cultural officer."

All I got from her at the end of an hour was, "Well, I got to get back to the office. I have a 2:00 meeting."

It was the same with projects aimed at reaching out to Iraq's libraries. There was plenty of talk, but no results. I proposed that online English instruction become an integral part of the American Corners effort. The idea went nowhere in Baghdad or here in Washington. In Anbar there are five public libraries in towns and cities along the Euphrates, in Fallujah, Ramadi, Haditha, Qa'im and Ana. Gabriel and I had multiple meeting with the librarians of each. They were enthusiastic about hosting a Corner and especially when it might be an English center featuring computers, Net connections, or lessons provided on discs.

When I returned to Washington I worked on a write-up or business plan for presentation to State. No interest.

The idea might work like this: As a pilot, the CAO (cultural affairs officer) at the embassy would work with the Ministry of Education and the provincial directors general (DG) of education and/or culture to arrange for English lessons on-or-offline at the American Corners. For example, the librarian would schedule sessions from 3-4:00 PM for primary students, 4-5:00 PM for intermediate grades, and 5-7:00 PM for high schoolers.

Simultaneously, the embassy might work with the provincial university to provide higher-level instruction, perhaps via the Fulbright program, for teacher training.

Initially what I suggested to these people is for State to adjust Fulbright to real-life security conditions in Iraq. So you have faculty at KU in Lawrence where they have a *very* strong TESOL program, or Shenandoah University in Winchester where they have a *very* strong TESOL program, or recruit people via International TESOL right here in Alexandria, Virginia, the professional home of the English-as-a-foreign language

profession. After selection, these faculty become full-fledged Fulbrighters, but not residential Fulbrighters. They are Fulbrighters in the United States, but assigned to Iraq full time. That's their job for or two semesters. They would have no local teaching load; they would get the same stipend as they would if they were overseas. In short, they would do what a Fulbrighter would do overseas, except do it remotely, from the US. So that was my suggestion, and that was too much for State Department personnel to swallow in Baghdad or Washington. So I'm just about to give up.

Q: Don't.

ALBIN: So that's my preachment about TESOL and libraries.

Q: No, no, things aren't, aren't changing. Well, let's -- because we are sticking to --

ALBIN: Egypt.

Q: Well, we'll stick to Egypt for a while. Did you sense a, a change in attitude toward the United States? Towards what we were doing and all while you were there? I mean was --

ALBIN: You have to remember, and I think anybody associated with Egypt will agree with this, whether they're on the military side, like the attaché corps, or whether they're with State or USAID or with one of the NGOs. I think they would all agree that Egypt and the Arabs in general have a national sport. Do you know what it is? Complaining. If the United States were the Angel Gabriel bestowing manna from above – which the US has been doing for decades --Egyptians would find something to criticize about our manna. In terms of dollars and food assistance, we kept supplying Egypt even when we had no diplomatic relations. So we mustn't look at surface complaining for the real damage to our relations.

Q: I spent four years in Greece and we were the -- thank God there's a European Union now. And I'm sure they've moved their focus away from us.

ALBIN: *(laughs) To the, to the, to the Germans are some other bad guy (laughs).*

Q: Oh yeah. Oh yeah, well --

ALBIN: That's true. But you know, you have to get below the surface. Everybody in Iraq hates the United States and hates Bush, right? But at the same time everyone wants English and everybody wants to take refuge here. Similarly, in the 1970's and 1980's, everybody was beating up on the United States at cocktail parties, at dinner parties, in conversations in offices, art galleries, lecture halls, everywhere. Let's say I gave a lecture in Tunis on a library topic. The first question from the audience: "What about Israel?" Then privately: "How can I get a visa to America?" Or, proudly, "My son is a student at the University of Texas."

Q: No, it's -- when, when, you know, taking these soundings, what you're saying is so true. But did you feel that what we were doing -- because we had -- for years we've had this massive aid program. And I kind of wonder is it going anywhere.

ALBIN: Well, you know, I'm glad you asked. I talked about my views of USAID in the last session. The President mentioned it in yesterday's speech. He mentioned the importance of foreign assistance. In fact, he said something surprisingly candid. He said a lot of surprisingly candid things. But one of the things he said was it is the most unpopular element of the U.S. budget, although it's under 1% of U.S. expenditures. And he's right. I oppose USAID as an agency. And I oppose every dollar we spend in foreign assistance, foreign development assistance, not humanitarian assistance, development assistance. I oppose such assistance because it's administered by USAID. If it were not administered by USAID I might be a lot more sympathetic to its programs. We know that the unpopularity of AID and its waste and hypocrisy is not a new phenomenon. The unpopularity goes back to the time when I was a youth. Nobody I knew as a kid or university student had any use for sending money to Peru or some other remote place. It was misunderstood and disliked then as Point Four and it's misunderstood and disliked *now*. If the President expects that AID or the money that it administers, will stem the tide and undermine the appeal of Islamist extremism, he's got another think coming. If that had been the case then all those hundreds of billions of dollars we've been spending since the 1940's, under Truman, and Ike until now, would have prevented Islamism in the first place! We would have had no Islamism! If these development programs had achieved their goals there would be no need for GWOT (Global War on Terrorism). We have to recognize that the so-called development billions are political billions, bribes, not "programs."

Q: Do you see any -- I mean again, looking at Egypt at the time, did you see any positive impact of what we were --

ALBIN: None. Occasionally I saw the positive impact of an individual project. Let's say a sewer, or a series of textbooks, or the refitting of a science labs. But these are short-term achievements. The latest buzz is all about capacity building, a mushy term for a mushy excuse for keeping American aid personal safe behind embassy walls and projecting our presence through "implementing partners." Are you kidding?

Q: OK, OK. But these are -- each one of these is -- I mean a good sewer system is a good -- makes for better health in a --

ALBIN: A sewer system is a joy forever, or at least for 150 years. However, you didn't let me finish -- a good sewer system, a well-equipped physics laboratory, an up-to-date textbook redesign, are individually very wonderful. But their virtues are overshadowed by the negativity of AID *telling* the Egyptians they need a sewer system or new textbooks, in other words interfering in their affairs. Egyptians *resent this*, the Iraqis *resent it*, the Yemenis *resent it*. They feel the condescension and hypocrisy.

Q: Well, they're --

ALBIN: Let me finish. That's number one. And number two is that the -- that group of people administering the programs is so arrogant and so isolated from the Egyptian population that the Egyptians have *no use* for them.

Q: OK. What about sitting back and relaxing and saying, "You're a country. You take care of yourself."

ALBIN: OK, that's fine. I would love to see that happen. That was the attitude that we used, that the army used in Iraq and the run-up to the withdrawal from Iraq in '11, in 2011. And that's our strategy in Afghanistan today, between now and the end of 2014. President Obama said it yesterday. The future is in the hands of the Afghans. Iraq is in the hands of the Iraqis. OK. I'm all for that. I have said it myself. I advocated for it when I was in Iraq with the Army. But that doesn't mean abdicating our impact as the world's leader. Leadership doesn't mean fighting their wars for them, or building their sewers. It doesn't mean we have to teach their kids for them. It doesn't mean we have to cure their sick for them. It means that we have the resources to help them do it themselves, to get them on their feet. The Iraqis can do it. I'm not sure the Afghans can ever do it, but the Iraqis can do it for sure. Egyptians can do it. That's where the State Department comes in and that's what makes me *so angry* at State. One of the paradoxes or dilemmas that we Americans face, we who are interested in foreign affairs, is what the President alluded to yesterday when he said that we will implement every one of the recommendations of the Advisory Review Board. That is Pickering's investigative board which Hillary Clinton set up to investigate Benghazi. That review board put out a number of recommendations. I don't know whether you've read them, but *I have*. And what they will do is handcuff American personnel, State Department personnel, and embassies overseas, so there will be *no* impact on the Libyans, Egyptians, Iraqis, Turks, on *anybody* else. By implementing Pickering's recommendations, we are emasculating ourselves, isolating ourselves in prisons of our own making called embassies.

Q: Yeah, well we've been doing this little by little over the years.

ALBIN: That's why I say, in answer to your question about USAID, yes, individual -- individual projects may have been successful. Many other projects have not. I'll get to that in a moment. But many projects have been successful, and that's wonderful. In the course of those projects people have been trained, local NGO's have been brought in to participate. These are positive results. But they are in my view overwhelmed by the imposition of these procedures, of these policies and procedures on the host country, *and* the arrogance of the people who administer the money. So let me get to my next point.

Another reason I fundamentally oppose the use of AID in executing the President's plan for undermining Islamic extremism psychologically and culturally is because neither USAID nor the State Department examines itself. Neither agency has an auditor that will look at its own programs. (I count State and Aid together because the latter is a wholly-owned subsidiary of the former.) In fact, SIGAR and SIGIR (the special independent

auditors) revealed to the American public more facts about our war effort and the reconstruction and sustainability effort than *any number of Times or Post investigations*. Or any number of press releases from State or DOD. Those two offices, the special auditors, ought to get medals for their work. State Department absolutely, categorically, refused to participate in the audits although they were supposedly part of the all-of-government effort, whole-of-government effort. If President Obama thinks that he's going to be able to unify the effort overseas to undermine Islamism he's dreaming. It ain't going to happen. I say it again, it is not going to happen.

Q: How did you, at the time you were in Egypt, see the goals of Islamism there at that time?

ALBIN: Well, remember, I was there in 1980 -- up until 1985. After '85 I rarely set foot in the Middle East. I didn't set foot in Egypt again until 2007.

Q: OK.

ALBIN: I would be a liar if I said I saw 9/11 coming. What I saw was Egyptians becoming very religious, slowly at first, but with increasing speed. I didn't see the world-encompassing, West-destroying al-Qaeda movement. I saw Islamic extremism develop. Let's go back to 1979 and the Khomeini Revolution. That was a watershed time. That generated a lot of talk in Egypt, among the intellectuals in Egypt, or the chattering classes, as they're called. Egypt was *rocked* by that. Sadat was rocked. The U.S. was rocked. I mean we were all on the qui vive for indications that the revolution was coming to Cairo. But it didn't. I had visiting friends of mine, I'll name 'em -- well, I won't name them, but they are not in government. They were very deeply steeped in political studies. Senior professors at various American universities, friends of mine who had come to Egypt on study tours or whatever. They either stayed with me or we wine and dined together. I took them around, introducing them to the intelligentsia. These professors never stopped talking and querying and probing their Egyptian interlocutors about Khomeini and the consequences of his ideology for Egypt. Generally speaking, there was concern, but the Egyptian attitude was it can't happen here. Sadat was assassinated sometime later, some couple of years later. The incident was tied to the Iran -- to general Muslim unrest. I won't go into regional unrest at the time, the Palestinians, and the Afghan situation, and that sort of thing. We'll leave that aside. But just concentrating on Egypt: people were pretty concerned, -- but not panicked, wondering whether an Islamic Revolution was around the corner for them. So I can't say that I saw it coming. I can't say I told you so. In 2007, when I was there after *all* these things had happened, 9/11, up to our eyebrows in Iraq, up to our eyebrows in Afghanistan, the GWOT, I would say that in the upper strata among the intellectuals and professors there was a good deal of concern but still a smugness and satisfaction with the way Egypt was keeping the Islamist fanatics at bay.

Q: This is 2007.

ALBIN: Yes. There was a good deal of smugness. As there was twenty years before about the malign influence of Saudi Arabia and the money that was coming into Egypt to fuel the Islamic trend. The Muslim Brotherhood was still outlawed in 2007. They didn't have an official voice, but they enjoyed an unofficial presence in the parliament. They had a lot of parliamentary members, I think as many as 60, although I shouldn't be quoted on that. But they had had good parliamentary success running as independents. They had various print publications. The bookstores were full of their stuff in 2007. The streets -- if the streets could talk, they would say, "Islam, Islam, Islam." They would say, "Allahu Akbar." If the streets could talk they would do *nothing* but pray. I looked down from my balcony in Zamalek, one of the upper strata neighborhoods of downtown Cairo, and what did I see? Women covered. Bearded men. Girls covered on their way to school. I mean street scenes that were nearly inconceivable 20 or 25 years before. So if the upper classes were sanguine in 1979, they were deceived. So was I. It was a false hope that things would come out all right. Egypt is a Muslim country. I have said to my liberal friends, analysts, and journalists, that we should never forget that Egypt is a deeply Islamic country. These friends take the side of the liberals, and that distorts their analysis. For my part I try not to take sides. I try to stay objective. My experience and instincts tell me that Egypt is going through a period when it doesn't want the West. It wants the comfort of the Almighty. My heart is with the liberals and with the secularists. But I know that Egypt is not a liberal country. Egypt is an Allahu Akbar country. And my American friends, many of whom are academics, 50% academics and most of the rest are retired Foreign Service, USAID, or military intellectuals. If they think for one minute that the liberals stand a chance against Allahu Akbar in Egypt, they're wrong. They've been wrong for the last two years. They've been wrong since January 25th, 2011. If that's what INR, Intelligence and Research, or if that's what your political counselors are sending back to Washington in their cables, then they should be fired!

Q: I -- I -- well now --

ALBIN: And the reason we don't know what they're sending back in their cables is because we don't have access to it, do we?

Q: No, we --

ALBIN: And why not?

Q: Well, I mean it comes out if -- usually, usually what's reported gets reported to the general public over time.

ALBIN: (laughs)

~~~~~*Q: No, it really does, you know.*

ALBIN: Yeah, I understand.



*Q: We -- our system is not an enclosed one. Of course part of it is what do we want to hear. You know, I mean the press and all.*

ALBIN: I agree. But you know, The New York Times claims it's the first draft of history and so forth. No, the first draft of history is what's coming out in the embassy cables. And we have to wait for this miscreant or that criminal like Julian Assange to reveal it to us. I'm sorry, but this is not what I mean by being well informed about American foreign policy.

*Q: Well, no, no. The foreign affairs policy of the United States involves going -- I mean these are a distillation by committee --*

ALBIN: *(laughs)*

*Q: -- and government committees.*

ALBIN: Right.

*Q: So I mean there it is.*

ALBIN: *(laughs)*

*Q: In the good old days, back in the -- I've read some of the ones back in the 1860's when Abraham Lincoln started this process, these are pretty good. Because there wasn't any concern. In fact, they're a little bit too good.*

ALBIN: I have to go back -- thank you.

*Q: Seriously, I -- I did a book on the Counselor Service in the United States. And 18, say '62 or something like this our counsel in Santiago, Cuba wrote saying, you know, these Spanish sort of colonist tufts sort of are pretty horrible people and all that. And it was very disrespectful of it. Well, the next year the foreign relations published this. And of course our guy in Santiago said, "Look, these are horrible people. They're tufts, they're nasty, but you -- don't report this stuff, because it causes mobs in front of the consulate." So of course next year his complaint was published again of -- I mean it gives you an idea of what --*

ALBIN: *(laughs)* Love it...love it. There is a dilemma, isn't there?

*Q: Oh yeah.*

ALBIN: *(laughs)*

*Q: Well anyway, what -- before we leave this sort of Cairo world, but it was more than Cairo, could you sort of -- what were you picking up from Turkey through that whole air*

*of crescent over to Morocco, and include Malta? What were some of your impressions of the countries?*

ALBIN: Well, let me talk about Malta for a moment.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: Why was Malta -- where is Malta anyway? But --

*Q: Well, I belong to a generation --*

ALBIN: *(laughs)*

*Q: -- who knew Malta because it was extremely important during World War II.*

ALBIN: Indeed. It was extremely important at one time.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: Anyway, so why Malta? That was part of my salesmanship to the brass at the Library. If you'll recall during sometime in the '70s or '80s, I can't remember exactly the years, Gaddafi was thick with the new socialist government of Malta. And the socialists had allowed Gaddafi to set up shop in Malta for Lord knows what reasons. Well, one of the reasons was that he could use it as a launch point to introduce his propaganda into Italy where it would leak north into Europe all the way to the North Pole as far as I know. Who could figure out Gaddafi?

*Q: Yeah. With zero effect, in many ways.*

ALBIN: *(laughs)* Duh.

*Q: And what do you do with oil money?*

ALBIN: Got to send it somewhere. His name was Dom something or other, the prime minister of --

*Q: Mintoff.*

ALBIN: Mintoff, Dom Mintoff, exactly, yes. Thank you. So anyway, he had a brief reign of a couple of years. --

*Q: Well, he kicked the British out.*

ALBIN: Yeah, he was patriot, stuff like that. So he was Malta's Castro or something.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: In any case, I sold the Library on the idea of adding Malta to my little empire so that I could collect Libyan publications. So they said, “Yeah, go ahead, add Malta to your list.” So I had a delightful trip or two to Valletta. And talked to Socialist Party people and to the conservative party people. I went to their headquarters. I didn’t see Mintoff himself, but I did see the guy who replaced him. I remember going to the tiny American embassy and arranging to pouch my books acquisitions back to Cairo.

*Q: It was an embassy.*

ALBIN: Full embassy. It was in an office building and I just stuck my nose in to say hi and just see if I could use their facilities to mail my haul back to Cairo, which they allowed me to do. As always, very helpful. And so I talked to the apparatchiks of the left and right, and I talked to the Jesuits who ran the university there and were very influential. And I spent a lot of time in bookstores and bookstalls. There was one big bookstore in the main street of Valletta I remember, and I bought everything that I could lay my hands on. It was not overwhelming pile of things. I entered subscriptions to various magazines so they could be mailed to me in Cairo. I also found an agent in Valetta to acquire for us. I think the arrangement still operates. On one or two trips I collected all the all the Libyan crap that was on the bookshelves or in the bookstore of the Libyan Cultural Center Library. I had no compunction about walking out of the library with my briefcase full of purloined Libyan propaganda. So yeah, that were pretty fun.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: The, the intellectual vibrancy of Morocco left a big impression on me. I went to Morocco many times over the years, and it stands out to me as a country with a very French-like intelligentsia, a deeply imbedded French spirit, more than just a patina. It was a deep rooted French-ness that I think made Morocco stand out in my experience. Perhaps Algeria was another such country, but I was never in Algeria. It’s the only Arab country, that and Oman, that I never got a chance to visit. Granted I never had a chance to stay in the Rif or the High Atlas or the villages on the coast. I had to do with Casablanca, Rabat, Fez, Tangier, and Tetouan. I made the rounds of universities, government offices, and bookstores and book fairs – the usual stops.

*Q: Marrakesh.*

ALBIN: Never got to Marrakesh. Morocco struck me as dynamic country, very different from much of the Arab World. A very intellectually curious world. A country that reads, in contrast to the rest of the Arab World. The Arabs report on themselves and have been honest about this for many decades: that they don’t read. Its people don’t read. There’s the famous saying, “Egypt writes, Lebanon publishes, Iraq reads.” There’s some truth in that. I would say that of the Arab countries Iraq and Morocco stand out as the readers. Everything else in between you can forget. If you consider that Egypt, the largest of the Arab countries, is pretty near 100 million in population, let’s say 85 to 90 million. I don’t know what the latest numbers are, but *a lot*. Half of whom -- according to statistics that

I've read during the current revolution -- half of whom can't read or write. Of the literate, only of the *very* small veneer read and write seriously. Shame on Egypt. Egypt is no different I think than most of the other Arab countries, most of Tunisia, for as small and as concentrated and as literate as Tunisia is, it never impressed me as a reading country. And I've been to Tunisia many, many times. I was in Tunisia as a Fulbright scholar and *never* got the impression that Tunisians were fundamentally readers like the Iraqis and the Moroccans are. So Morocco culturally speaking was always a pleasant surprise to me. Conversationally, I mean I had wonderful conversations with Moroccan professors and journalists and even with bureaucrats and other classes. Turkey: I've been to Turkey many times over the years. I used to vacation there with my family when we were stationed in Cairo. It was our vacationland of choice. Every time we had a three-day weekend we'd fly to Istanbul. I never collected books outside of Istanbul. I've traveled personally outside of Istanbul as a tourist, but I've never been there on business. Only Istanbul. I was fortunate to -- on my first business trip -- identify an agent who continues to be our contractor. A very effective guy. He covers Turkey extremely well for us. I'm sure that the Turkish collection of the Library of Congress over the last 10 years is probably the envy of any research library in the world, thanks to the office in Cairo and to the dynamic bookseller we have in Istanbul. Do you know the city?

*Q: No, I don't.*

ALBIN: Magnificent city. I could never get enough of Istanbul. And to this day I wouldn't have any objection if I had to retire there. And the same is true of Morocco.

*Q: I've been to Istanbul, but I don't really know the city.*

ALBIN: You don't. I haven't been there for 20 years. So I don't know it currently either and it's probably grown and changed beyond recognition. But the Istanbul that I knew was a marvelous city. The Turkey that I knew is a very diffuse and diverse country. I don't claim to speak the language very well. I used to speak it pretty OK, but that was a long time ago. Turkey is a reading country. Turkey is an ambitious country. Turkey was a lot more open intellectually than most of the Arab dictatorships, even though Turkey went through military control. Turkey, Tunisia, Morocco, in those three countries there was always an undercurrent among the people that I talked to, an undercurrent of great fear of the regime, great fear of the secret police. In Morocco's case, great fear of the king and his security apparatus. In Tunisia, a great fear of the president and his family and their security apparatus. On Turkey people feared the army and its security apparatus. But you know, at my level of interaction on a business level in the book business and in the publications acquisitions business, I never felt constrained. The Egyptians, the Tunisians, the -- even the Lebanese, the Syrians, they never read anyway. So if a few leftists were suppressed, their novels censored, or their jeremiads against the regime squashed, so what? Nobody would have read 'em anyway. Politics is handled secretly in the coffee shops, in the streets, on the university campus, in the various media, and so forth.

*Q: Well, what do you do about Iraq?*

ALBIN: In those days, Iraq was under Saddam. Iraq was terra incognita to me. I should have included Iraq as one of the countries I never visited. So Oman, Iraq, and Algeria I never visited for the Library. During the sanctions we were never able to get anything out of Iraq. So there was no sense even trying. For many years after 1985 I ran or was intimately associated with running, acquisitions for the Library of Congress worldwide. Every time the United States imposed sanctions on somebody -- like Cuba or Iran or Iraq or South Africa -- the flow of our publications stopped. Forbidding books is one of the stupidest kinds of shoot yourself in the foot restrictions imaginable.

*Q: You mentioned at one point, of all the Arab countries Saudi Arabia was not your favorite.*

ALBIN: Who can like Saudi Arabia?

*Q: Yeah. Well, I lived there two and a half years.*

ALBIN: Did you like Saudi Arabia?

*Q: Not particularly, but I was in Dhahran, and it was, it was sort of like Tulsa.*

ALBIN: *(laughs)*

*Q: A big oilfield and an American oil company, so you know. But would you talk about your Saudi experience?*

ALBIN: Yes. How often was I in Saudi Arabia during those 10 years? I don't know, maybe more than once a year. Why was that? Because the publications scene -- as you can imagine, the intellectual scene in Saudi Arabia was in a word, backward. Saudis at a certain level were probably the saddest critters in the whole Arab world. One of the reasons I went to Saudi Arabia as frequently as I did is because they issued a lot of official publications. Every ministry, every directorate general, every university faculty, each had tons of money to spend, so they put out slick journals, studies, and statistical compilations. The Abdulaziz University Journal of Internal Medicine, or Journal of Geospatial Imaging. That kind of thing. All the deans and department chairs had money to spend. So that's why I went. Not because of the commercial publications. The commercial publications were repetitive gruel, simplistic fiction, repetitive poetry, pietistic books and booklets, local histories. Sometimes freshly matriculated PhDs would publish their dissertations. These were usually on religious subjects. We collect local histories, and I'm glad we do. They're all useful. Of all of the many conversations I had with Saudi academics the one I remember most was with the Chairman of the Department of Geography at -- I can't remember which university it was -- in Riyadh. It was an unbelievable experience. I went into his office. As I say, he was the department chairman. The department of geography had a building of its own, as I recall, or had a big wing of a social science faculty or arts faculty building, lavish as you can imagine -- all glass and fancy looking. I got there early, as I usually did to these appointments, so I could snoop

and browse. It was open to the public. I went to the library and looked around. It was extremely well stocked with all the international journals and recent books. Geography is not my field, but it looked like they had everything up to date as could be. They had the computer terminals. It was just fancy as hell. But not a soul in the place. Not a soul – no readers, no librarian. Empty. So my time for the appointment came and I went in. The chairman was welcoming, gave me coffee. He was dressed Saudi style. And we had a general conversation. And then at the end of 15 or 20 minutes he gave me whatever publications he had, the latest journals. At the end of the conversation he got up from his desk, closed his office door, and said, “Could I speak to you frankly a little bit, for a while? Just kind of as a friend?”

And I said, “Why sure, that would be nice.”

“Can I get you some more coffee?”

I said, “No, I’m fine.”

He said -- we were speaking in English. He said, “I’m a graduate of USC (University of Southern California). I have a PhD in geography from USC. And, and I’m the unhappiest guy in the world.” And he proceeded for the next hour, or perhaps even more, to lay his soul bare to me about his professional career and the cultural wasteland that is Saudi Arabia, and the intellectual wasteland that was the university and his department. He told me stories of students who were subsidized to do nothing, about the intellectual sloth of the students, the fact that everybody gets high grades and nobody deserves them. Scholarships are awarded for overseas study and travel willy-nilly to anybody who asks. There are no standards. No education is happening. And by the way, just to deviate for a minute, I understand according to statistics that I’ve read and/or heard, that there are upwards of 100,000 going on 150,000 Saudi students in the United States. Did you know that?

*Q: No, but I knew that it was high.*

ALBIN: Yeah, boy. I’m amazed. Students were being sent over by the *carload*, he told me. I’d have to go back to my notes because I came back and I wrote up the meeting because it was such a spectacular venting of frustration.

*Q: Well actually, you know, you’ve got two sets. You’ve got the Saudis coming and the Chinese. The Chinese are real students and they’re absorb -- I mean they’re really getting educated. And the Saudis are getting girls and, you know, I mean my --*

ALBIN: Sure.

*Q: This is my impression, I --*

ALBIN: I think, Stu, that you are right. I don’t suppose -- well anyway, I don’t know them. I’m not connected in the Saudi community here.

*Q: But you've got to remember that -- I know one institution refers to the Chinese coming -- first place, they've got good students. But also it's their cash cow.*

ALBIN: *(laughs)*

*Q: And you can imagine the Saudi one, OK, so we'll have a department of benevolent neglect, Abdulaziz's Department of Benevolent Neglect. And picking up their -- they charge full tuition and --*

ALBIN: Sure. Absolutely. Oh, I don't know what the statistics are. I aim to find out, but.

*Q: But did you ever get any opportunity to look at what the Saudis' educational system were teaching their young people? Particularly about Islam vis-à-vis the rest of the world?*

ALBIN: I --

*Q: Because one of the great concerns I think has been that the Saudis have been sponsoring anti-Western teachings, vis-à-vis Islam and all, to students in Nigeria -- well, anywhere there are madrassas.*

ALBIN: Yes.

*Q: And were we monitoring this at all?*

ALBIN: Well, I was not a spy and I was not in the Intel business.

*Q: Well, you're not a spy, but I mean it's part -- part of it is published material.*

ALBIN: Oh!

*Q: They found it here in Arlington, for God's sake.*

ALBIN: In Falls Church and in Arlington.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: Absolutely. No. This is the kind of stuff I've picked up. I didn't have a list supplied to me by my bosses in Washington. I had a list that was supplied to me by me, that I made -- that I made of the sheikhs and the preachers and the influential preachers and sheikhs and imams of Saudi Arabia. So I would look for their stuff when I went to the bookstores in Saudi Arabia. By the way, I also looked for those books on the stands in Cairo and any other city I went to in the Middle East. Sheikh ibn Baz was one. I forget who the stars of the jihad were in those days. The Wahhabis, were publishing a lot. They were publishing pamphlets and they would publish grand volumes of sermons and

preachments. They had Muhammad bin Saud University that was *totally* given over to the Da'wah. I don't think I was even allowed on its campus, come to think of it. So yes. In Egypt, the publications were not nearly as effective as the internet and the electronic media became by the time I went back in 2007 when everyone had access to the internet. Publications on the street corner or sold on the curb outside of mosques were not nearly as effective as the flood of stuff that was coming over the internet that Egyptians were watching in 2007 when I went back for that TDY. That was an eye-opener for me. And all of a sudden I became a believer in the nefariousness and effectiveness of the Saudi propaganda machine.

*Q: Yeah. And apparently from all accounts this was a deal with the devil. You don't mess around with a god who will allow you religious leaders to preach whatever you want.*

ALBIN: That's right. I don't know about the underpinnings of the regime, but I would think that that's the principal one.

*Q: Were you ever -- well, did anybody ever from the State Department, the CIA and all, I mean not using you as a spy, but you're collecting material, which certainly added to intelligence about the country. And I think particularly about the educational system when we're talking about Saudi Arabia. Did anybody ever ask you about this or not?*

ALBIN: No one.

*Q: So you were pouring it in and as far as you knew you say they're not readers and -- do you think anybody was reading this?*

ALBIN: Well, we don't know, do we? Because we don't have a look on the inside.

*Q: Yeah. But I was wondering, you know -- yeah, somebody in --*

ALBIN: I mean what can I tell you about our achievements? I don't know much about the regime-- *our* regime -- because I'm excluded as a citizen -- I'm excluded from learning about it. But one thing I do know about it is that it took 10 years for the CIA to catch Osama! Now, how good is *that*?

*Q: OK. Well, I think -- looking at the time -- probably a good place to stop. And we'll pick this up the next time in 1985. And you came back here to -- and we'll talk about what you're up to then.*

ALBIN: Fine.

*Q: By the way, make note if something occurs to you that we didn't cover in this '75 to '85 period --*

ALBIN: Be glad to.



*Q: -- that you think we should cover. Make a note of it and we will --*

ALBIN: Excellent. Very good.

*Q: Great. All right.*

ALBIN: I looked at your website. It is *really* a fun site.

*Q: All right. Today is the -- it's the 7<sup>th</sup> of June, 2013 and this is interview with Mike Albin. And Mike, you wanted to talk about being a librarian in Cairo.*

ALBIN: Yes. Thank you. The librarian -- she was called the post librarian. She was a Foreign Service National employee, an Egyptian, and a very astute observer of the political scene in Egypt. And she and I were good friends during the entire period that I was assigned there, for those 10 years, and we've remained friends and are still in contact, Christmas card contact over the years. Nadia Rizk was her name, R-I-Z-K. Nadia was a graduate of the American University in Cairo in political science or history. And she was, as I said, a really keen observer of the Cairo political scene, to the extent that the ambassadors and the political officers and others at the embassy would pay a good deal of attention to what she had to say. Her English was perfectly fluent, idiomatic American English. And she and I struck up a collegial association, being librarians and interested in publications in Egypt. It's the only post that I know of -- now, help me out on this, Stu, since your experience is much wider than mine -- it's the only post that I know of that had a real honest to goodness working library at the disposal of Foreign Service Officers at post.

*Q: No, I know you may be correct.*

ALBIN: It was a luxury, I guess, that's why the ambassadors sprung for it. It wasn't a large library. It was about three or four times the size of this room. It was tenderly tended by Nadia, and widely used by some of us at post. She had some basic subscriptions to American magazines and some basic subscriptions to English language stuff that had to do with Egypt, statistical publications, for example, references of that kind. Most of the books on the shelves had to do with modern Middle Eastern history, Egyptian history, in English, American university press publications or mainline commercial press publications. But her value was as an observer of the scene, rather than her book collection, it always seemed to me. So I'd go in there with coffee of a morning and we'd shoot the bull for a half hour or 45 minutes and review the shenanigans of the Egyptian government, or the shenanigans of the U.S. government, or the general goings on in the Middle East, and especially in Egypt. Now, the reason I bring this up is because she was the first person I know of, bar none, who discerned the rise of the Islamic movements in Egypt. I know that in the case of Ambassador Herman Eilts, who was also a really keen observer, a careful close observer of Egyptian politics --

*Q: Yes.*

ALBIN: -- that her opinions and her observations had a big impact on his thinking. Rest his soul -- I think he died three or four years ago. But in any case, she certainly had an impact on my thinking. I argued with her, because my read, from my perspective around town, with the literati as I was describing to you earlier, or the journalistic scribblers, or the academics that I was in contact with, was that everything was *cool*. The intelligentsia didn't think much of Sadat, but they were confident that he was keeping the Islamists in check. So my read on the Islamic trend was sort of a benign. The left -- we'll call 'em the left, it was a mushy left, it wasn't really a hard hammer and sickle left, but kind of a mushy left, was understanding of Sadat's position and willing to go along with him, even though most hated Camp David. They had no real power anyway in the state. Parliament was a joke and the press was controlled, so they really didn't have any leverage against Sadat. I discerned no Islamic movement of note in the mid '70s, beginning '75, '76, '77 for example. Nadia, on the other hand, was seeing the rise of the Brotherhood as no one else was.

*Q: The Muslim Brother --*

ALBIN: The Muslim Brotherhood as no one else that I ever talked to in town was willing to talk about. Similarly, she mentioned other groups more radical than the Brotherhood. The Brotherhood was maybe an insidious group in terms of the mass population in the country. It eventually had a great effect on the Egyptian masses. But Nadia discerned underneath the Brotherhood, and not necessarily allied with it, more radical groups, more violent groups, like Takfir wal-Hijrah and groups like Jamaat-e-Islami, the so-called Islamic grouping. These were shadowy groups whose names were never mentioned in any press, in any conversation, and were in deep cover. Nadia was prepared to talk about them, at least to me and to others at the embassy. I often pooh-poohed her opinions. Why did I do that? First of all, because I was not hearing it myself among my contacts. And secondly, Nadia was a Copt. And the Copts generally, in my observation, were politically active or politically aware, and like Nadia, had a chip on their shoulder. And they were constantly looking on the dark side of Egyptian politics. It turned out in the long run, they were right. I tip my hat to her in this little memoir. And I wanted to make sure that I brought her up because your interest in the last week or two has been in what things were really like in the country. The description that I'm giving you wouldn't be complete without bringing in Nadia's opinion.

*Q: You mentioned Ambassador Eilts. Did she and he talk?*

ALBIN: Oh, absolutely. They were good buddies. I'm pretty sure that he was a big user of Nadia's library and Nadia's services as reference librarian and resource person for questions like "who was that guy I met last night," that sort of query.

*Q: I want to point out for somebody who's not initiated. There are certain local employees who are so well plugged in to the local scene who can tell you who's who. I mean any American diplomat meets a great number of people. And you have to have somebody you can go to to say, "Do you realize that person is the head of the locals whatever it is," or something, or, "Watch out for that person." I mean it has to be treated*

*with a certain amount of caution, but we have these, in other societies you call them social secretaries.*

ALBIN: That's right.

*Q: But, but, but the point is you have to have an informant who knows, who knows the territory.*

ALBIN: Yes.

*Q: Not just facts, but people.*

ALBIN: That's right. Well, that was among her many skills. There's a story with that. I think I mentioned earlier in these sessions, I was part of the country team. I think it was Nick Veliotis who one day was recounting a cocktail party or some such shindig he went to the night before. He asked the political counselor at his side,

*Q: Nick was DCM (deputy chief of mission) --*

ALBIN: No, Nick was ambassador.

*Q: Oh, he was ambassador then.*

ALBIN: He turned to the -- I don't remember who the political guy was, maybe Ed Peck, I don't remember for sure. He said, "Who was that fellow I was talking to the other night? You saw I was off in the corner talking to somebody. Who was that? He was on about something having to do with the university, the strike at the university or something."

And let's call him Ed. Ed said, "Well sir, I don't remember seeing you over there. Can you describe him to me?"

*(laughs)* And Veliotis said, "He was a short, dark fellow with a mustache named Mohammad."

*Q: (laughs)*

ALBIN: *(laughs)* "Oh yeah, that guy." *(laughs)*.

*Q: Oh.*

ALBIN: So yes, he needed a social secretary. They all did. All of us did.

*Q: By the way, since we're talking about the library again, did you sort of offhand monitor what sort of books the public -- I mean I assume these were mainly students and all were using this -- were looking at, or?*

ALBIN: Well, it wasn't my library. It was Nadia's library -- number one. And number two, it was restricted to the employees of the embassy. It was in the embassy. It was not in the chancellery building, but it was in the embassy. It was not a public library by any means. It was an important part of my situational awareness to know what people were reading. In fact, it was part of my approach to book selection to monitor trends as best I could. I always had my antenna out for what people were reading, whether it was the daily press, the weeklies -- the periodical press, or the books people were reading, or the textbooks students were being assigned at the university to the extent that I could find that out. Our book selection procedure at the Library of Congress Office was as follows. We dealt with contractors in the book trade. I will confine my remarks to just the Egyptian book and periodical scene. My job was to collect publications from the Arab countries and send them back to the Library and to 35 or so other libraries in the United States and some foreign countries like England and France. So in order to do that I had contracts in the Egyptian market with booksellers to supply the office with books on approval. Every book that was published in Egypt and every magazine that was newly published, or newspaper that was newly published in Egypt was delivered to the office on approval by booksellers. The publications came in big bundles. Maybe once a week. I had a staff of about 35 people. People in the office would open them and process them in various ways. I'll save all the detailed stuff for my memoirs for the Library of Congress.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: In the course of doing business on a weekly basis, I would sit with Dr. Saad Hagrassi, who was the chairman of the Library School at Cairo University. He was my main contractor and helper in book selection. Dr. Saad Hagrassi, who's very ill these days with Alzheimer's, unfortunately, was my main man. If Ambassador Eilts and the other embassy staff enjoyed Nadia as a resource person, I had Saad Hagrassi as my resource person. Saad knew everything about the cultural life of Egypt. He was very well plugged in. He and I would sit once or twice a week for let's say three hours going through those piles of books on approval. They were on all subjects. They were histories, poetry, textbooks at the university level. We never collected textbooks below the university level, unfortunately. There were new magazines. Did we want to subscribe or not? There were religious publications, tons of religious publications. Saad and I sat at a big table to analyze each book for its appropriateness for the program. Because of his connections at the university and his general intellectual curiosity and wide circle of friends, he was able give me background almost without exception on the author, whether he was popular, whether he was read, whether it was a self-published book which would go nowhere in the market and which nobody gave a damn about except his author and his family, or whether it was a book that would make a splash or that might have some sort of cultural impact. Who would be reading this particular book? Was it for leftist intellectuals? Was it for religious readers? There were lots of authors whose names I could reel off here. Mohammed al-Ghazzali, for example -- oh my goodness, I can just go on and on, Mitawalli al-Sha'rawi was another one -- Dozens of these religious writers were prolific. Saad would say, "Listen, two or three of this guy's works are enough to give a researcher a flavor his work. We don't have to buy this, his 25<sup>th</sup> title on the

biography of the prophet Mohammed. We really don't need this." So I took his advice 99% of the time. If it was a new poet, a literary person, a novelist, a social commentator, we would almost without exception acquire the publication. Even if it was a self-published work, because Egyptian publishing was primitive. It wasn't developed like it is in Europe and the United States. A lot of authors of quality had to publish their own works, especially if they were new authors just coming on the scene. Saad would be able to give me some judgment about the poetry, for example -- I don't do poetry very well. And he would give me some judgment about whether the poetry was of a quality, a collectible quality, or not. Short story collections and novels, histories of modern or medieval Egypt -- I didn't have too much trouble with because those are areas I like and follow.

*Q: Straight narrative.*

ALBIN: -- I was interested in. They were straight narrative works and were things I was interested in academically.

*Q: Yeah, yeah.*

ALBIN: So that's how we acquired publications and that's how I kept the pulse of the Egyptian reading public. Let me go back to Nadia's perceptions about the Islamization of Egyptian politics for a moment, because it ties in to my work. As we got into the early '80s it became clear that Nadia was right in her perceptions. Little by little I was beginning to see, among these approval copies that we were getting, more and more Islamic publications, more and more *new* authors, more and more collections of sermons by sheikhs who were prominent or those who were not so prominent. More and more collections of sermons on cassette tape. In the days before CDs we collected tapes.

*Q: Yeah, this is how Khomeini in Iran, made his mark with cassette tapes.*

ALBIN: This was a hot medium for sure. Although as far as I know Khomeini's preachments never got to Egypt because they were in Persian, not in Arabic, the phenomenon of the recorded voice of the preacher took off, stimulated no doubt by the Iranian situation, the Iranian Revolution and Khomeini's influence. So Nadia's observations began to make sense to me. I can tell you *exactly* when serious Islamization started in Egypt. I recognized that we were in for real fundamental cultural change the first time I saw a coed at the Cairo University campus in a veil. That was sometime in the fall of 1984. That's when I date the major shift toward Islam in the country.

*Q: You're talking about a veil. Not a hijab, but a --*

ALBIN: I'm talking about the Egyptian-style veil. Let me describe what I'm talking about.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: I'm talking about not the fully covered niqab, which would cover everything except the eyes.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: It was the sort of hat that Umm Kalthum, the famous singer, would wear. Or a scarf wrapped tightly and tied under the chin. Then there was a long coat, a trench coat or long garment under which she would wear her dress or slacks. This get-up became more and more common as the academic year '84-85 progressed. As I say, I left in '85, I was observing more and more of it along with the religious books that were coming in for selection to my office. It was clear that the Islamists were making a huge impact -- and by Islamists I include any organization, the Muslim Brotherhood, or any other organization that was having its impact people's style of dress and public behavior. Another indication on the male side was the appearance at more or less the same time, of what we used to call the zabib, the raisin, in the middle of the forehead where the man would bump his head forcefully on the floor, raising a scab or bruise indicating that he was praying like the dickens. It was a badge of piety.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: And that was never evident before the mid '80s at all. My friends, my Egyptian friends, the artistic class, the intellectual class, continued to drink beer and continued to socialize as usual. But there were indications that their women folk, for example, would be wearing some sort of scarf or dress that indicated modesty.

*Q: At the university, did you get any indication that the girls were wearing the veil through almost coercion by fundamentalist male students? Or was this their own announcement of their --*

ALBIN: Stu, I didn't spend as much time on campuses as I should have to be able to answer that question. My observation of Cairo U and Ain Shams University, the two largest universities in the city, was that there was no coercion, that it was a cultural wave that combined elements of family pressure. Not family coercion or radical coercion, but family pressure, peer pressure, and fashion. A girl didn't want to be different from her classmates.

*Q: Yeah. Yeah.*

ALBIN: I don't think the matter of coercion took a big part in this development.

*Q: The reason I ask is that in France at sort of the high school gymnasium level, the French government has raised the situation where there's been sort of coercion by male, the males tell the girls to shape up and wear the hijab.*

ALBIN: What happens in an Egyptian household with regard to pressure from fathers, brothers, uncles I have no way of knowing.

*Q: Of course.*

ALBIN: I didn't know the family circumstances of the working class, or even the middle class, well enough to know. I know that -- in those days -- let's say in round numbers 1980 to '85, this Islamic phenomenon -- the zabib, the so-called raisin, and later with increasing frequency the hijab -- was a source of jokes, because nobody can suppress the Egyptian sense of humor. So taxi drivers and shopkeepers and so forth would constantly joke about this. I would not feel any compunction about pointing out the outlandish regalia that some woman had on, or maybe her face was entirely covered, or maybe a guy's zabib was tumor-like in its size and ugliness. like leprosy or something.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: So you know, it was fodder for conversation and jokes.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: But the Copts, getting back to Nadia for a moment, the Copts were scared to death of the movement, and rightfully so, as it turned out.

*Q: What had been the history of the Copts and the Muslim world in Egypt -- I mean in -- you know, in fairly -- not way back, but in fairly recent times had they been living together relatively peacefully, or had there been outbreaks, or what?*

ALBIN: I don't pay scholarly attention, but I pay informed layman's attention to this. One of my friends a couple of months or so ago did an inventory of Coptic-Islamic outbreaks in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. And he sent it to me -- or he circulated it among some friends on a list serve that I run. He sent me a list of destructive outbreaks. And just to summarize, between let's say 1920 and today, so going on 100 years, we could say there was an incident of violence about every 10 years, or 12 years, something like that. Violence flared up, died out, flared up, died out. I think if I were to go back to that fellow's email, we'd find that much of the distress was in Upper Egypt, which as we know is in the south of the country, among the peasant classes where Copts and Muslims share villages or even towns and cities. Disputes break out, a church gets burned or a girl gets kidnapped or something happens. So that kind of thing may have occurred every 10 or 12 years. I would say that on the whole Egyptians were Egyptians, regardless of their religion. A situation similar to what I described with regard to Iraq. Iraqis were Iraqis and they didn't have this Shia-Sunni thing. They didn't wear the difference on their shirtsleeves as they do today. Similarly, in the last two years, since the Arab Spring started in Egypt on January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2011, the Coptic-Islamic strife has really increased in Upper Egypt and in Cairo, Alexandria, and the Canal cities. I think there's no question about it. The Copts, politically aware Copts like Nadia Rizk, were always complaining about and citing cases of discrimination in jobs and government offices. They claimed that Copts suffered in the economic life of the country. On the other hand, before the 1952 revolution, the Copts were in the catbird seat. By virtue of their get-up-and-go, their

contacts with the West, and their close associations with the British occupiers, they had it pretty good. They were big landowners, factory owners and professional people. My social science friends would probably correct me, but I would say a large percentage of the landowners, the cotton grandees and the like were Copts. They were disencumbered of their lands and businesses by the 1952 Revolution and they were snarly about it. But they had no place to go politically. I mean they didn't constitute enough of the population to create a viable political party. Their clergy, the Pope and the senior clergy, the bishops around the country, were always preaching pacifism, patience and brotherhood, and "we are all Egyptians." Now, as far as proselytization goes, on the part of the Muslims, I knew of no real outreach toward the Copts to try to Islamize them. I didn't observe any effort along those lines. My Coptic friends never complained about that aspect of inter-communal relations. Copts had their schools, their churches, and their social organizations. They even had a kind of political party, the Wafd, when it was allowed to operate. They had their newspaper. They were Egyptians and led a more or less peaceful life, I would say.

*Q: Mm-hmm. OK.*

ALBIN: It's a good question though. Especially now in the last two years when things have become more stressful.

*Q: Yeah. Well, you know, if there's anything more we want to talk about about your time in Cairo, maybe we can just keep in mind or enter at any time, but we can turn to 1985 when you're off.*

ALBIN: OK. Before we leave Cairo, let me just mention here -- and I'll use this as a placeholder so we don't forget. I was gone from Cairo from 1985 till 2007. When I got a four to six month contract with the Library of Congress to take my old job back while they recruited a permanent office director. That was 2007. I got back to Cairo New Year's Day 2007, or something like that. And I stayed for three or four months, maybe a little longer. So there was a 22-year gap in my living in Cairo which allowed me to appreciate the immense changes that took place in those two decades.

*Q: Well, why don't we talk about that now?*

ALBIN: OK. The ambassador in '07, was Frank Ricciardone. He and I hit it off nicely in a couple of ways. He had been in Egypt at an early stage of his diplomatic career. He had been a junior officer there, or had been with the Sinai Force, or something. I don't remember exactly where in his young years he served. But he and I had a similar perspective. I returned to Egypt as a real optimist. I came in from the airport at night, let's call it December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2006. I don't remember the exact date. The streets were empty, the town was asleep. I took a taxi into Zamalek, to my home, to my apartment where I would stay for the next few months. I was *astonished* at the changes. I saw skyscrapers, new bridges, freeways, new residential neighborhoods. In the coming weeks I saw clean streets, a little more orderly traffic, cleaner air, a clean subway, and new parks. I saw a town that had grown from a helter-skelter assembly of ramshackle tenements built around



the disintegrating ruins of nineteenth and early twentieth city quarters into what looked like a world capital. My view of that city, derived from that first midnight drive into town, didn't change over the months that I was there. I was truly optimistic about Cairo's future. I visited places during the course of my contract that I never would have dreamed of seeing. I saw information technology centers with state of the art analysts and machinery and investment capital and, an IT (information technology) city that had been built from nothing. It was absolutely astonishing. I saw investment in the cleanup of the city, in the face that Cairo presented to visitors. I saw a much more organized downtown. I saw prosperity being pushed into suburbs that didn't even exist before. I didn't even get to most of the middle class suburbs that were being built around Cairo. Those were outside the central city where I had most of my business.

I took a trip to Alexandria and noted that the governor was completely remaking the city. Rather than a shabby, rundown Mediterranean has-been it was revitalizing itself with a refurbished Corniche, hotels, restaurants and other businesses. It was almost exciting to be doing business there. I stayed for a couple days at the famous Cecil Hotel downtown. Across the public square was a bookstore that I wanted to shop in -- a large bookstore. I wanted to take stock of what was happening in Alexandria. So I went in there the first day of my visit and made the acquaintance of the old gent who was running the store. He was a dignified fellow who had a table in the back and was really not operating the business, but was the retired proprietor. The store was being operated by his kids, he being a kind of patriarch. I sat down and we started a conversation that lasted three or four days. Because, as I've told you before, the national sport of Egypt is complaining, he complained about all the terrible things that were happening to Alexandria in the course of the cleanup. Well, I could see driving around that the city was *booming*. The city was remaking itself, as I say. The beaches were much better, the Corniche was much better, the plumbing and electricity was much better, new hotels were being built for the thriving tourist industry. The cultural center downtown -- the streets downtown were being torn up and repaved without destroying the ambiance of the old neighborhoods. The streets were being refashioned, not *replaced*.

*Q: Were there still the open shops and --*

ALBIN: Yes, it still looked like a 1940's town.

*Q: I, I spent four years in Athens and was told by many Alexandria was the place to go and they produced the best belly dancers, all of whom were of Greek origin.*

ALBIN: I wouldn't be surprised about any of that. But, but I missed that during my 10 years in Egypt.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: Because as I described, it was ramshackle, it was rundown, it was *blighted*. It was a blighted city. Well, by 2007 all of that had changed. Investment was pouring in

there. Egyptian investment, Gulfi investment, maybe even Greek investment, I don't know.

*Q: What were they -- I mean, I mean obviously a lot of AID money had gone in for infrastructure. But what was there to make Egypt a financial power --*

ALBIN: Powerhouse? Well, Egypt by 2007 had a shot at becoming a viable economy. If the people in the streets beginning in January 2011, people of the Arab Spring, think that Egypt was a dying country under Mubarak, they're wrong. Nobody could have been wronger about the Egyptian Revolution of 2011. The "revolutionaries" and the media analysts were wrong. I was not in Egypt after 2007, after about March or April of 2007. I have not been back since then. But in 2007 I saw a booming country. Egypt was booming to the extent that I was willing to take some of my meager savings -- don't forget, I was no longer a government employee, I was a contractor, so I didn't have to worry about investing in a foreign country -- to buy stocks on the Egyptian stock market or buying real estate in Egypt. That is how prosperous it was becoming. I would have probably lost all a couple of years later in the Arab Spring.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: The problem with the Egyptian, like the problem with the Iraqi, is this: that his women continue to pump out babies. They will not stop having babies. No matter how fast the middle class grows the behinder they get in terms of the overall population. So I just mentioned to you that with regard to Cairo's development in those 22 years of my absence, I saw nothing but positive, forward motion. But let me throw some negative light on what I saw. I saw slums. I saw *no* respect for land, no respect for anything that had to do with architectural aesthetics in lower-income areas. There was little respect for the lower middle classes and their needs. There seemed to be no attention to the quarters that they had to live in and the services that served those places in terms of utilities, electricity, running water, sewage, or adequate schools. Millions lived in disastrous conditions. Again, because the Egyptian woman continues to pump out babies. The objective of a young Egyptian man is to marry a young Egyptian woman and to have as many babies as possible. That's their life's work it, it seems. It's true of the Iraqis as well. When I was with the Army in Iraq a little bit later, I would go into villages that were just a sea of kids. You'd almost be walking on them as you got down from your vehicle. They'd be clustered around you, so deep you can't imagine. And I don't know, *good God*, just waves of children.

*Q: Did you notice a change in literature, book publication, and all the second time you were --*

ALBIN: Ahhh, thank you. I would have been very remiss if I had not touched on that. 2007, I'm talking about the creature changes now, I'm talking about the development of the middle class and the downtown areas and the glitzy areas. And the rise -- or the spread, I won't say the rise of -- the spread of the slums, lower middle class areas. But the main development for me, and what I shared with Ambassador Ricciardone so we could

compare notes was the openness of the Mubarak regime to a free media. We had brown bag lunches for the staff on this subject. Now, people who know Egypt, today's Egypt, much better than I do have told me that that period was a kind of a Glasnost period under Mubarak, a period of openness, a period of Infitah, open door policy, at least an intellectual open door policy. I was seeing things on the TV, the Web, the newspapers and magazines that astonished me. The freedom with which writers were writing and commentators were commenting and religious figures were pontificating and liberals were haranguing and criticizing the government. I would go to work of a morning at the embassy. Our office, instead of being outside the embassy in Garden City as before, had been moved inside the embassy for security purposes. So we occupied a lot of square footage in the basement of the chancellery building. I would go to work in the morning across the public square over at Omar Makram Mosque. There was a lady standing outside selling newspapers with whom I did business every day. I'd buy a stack of newspapers for myself and the new weeklies and monthlies that had come out, just for my own reading. The opinions that I was seeing daily in that mountain of stuff would never have been possible under Sadat, or in the early Mubarak years. We were enjoying, as I say, a real Glasnost period. There was no topic of conversation that was verboten in the coffee shops. I was able to talk about *anything* in any coffee shop in any part of town that I visited, in Zamalek, in downtown, in Mahdi, in the Khan any part of town. I could say what I wanted to say. The Egyptian interlocutor could say anything he wanted to say. The same for dinner parties that I went to with old friends. The sky was the limit, you could talk about anything. Sex -- you could talk -- sex, sex programs on TV, sex advice programs on TV, unbelievable -- sex advice programs!

*Q: Could they actually kiss?*

ALBIN: In movies and in the famous Ramadan serial soap operas?

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: No. I have bought -- subsequently, back here at home, I have bought Egyptian movies where people kiss. But I think those scenes are excised when they're shown in Egypt.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: I don't know for sure.

*Q: Well, I know when I -- going back to the '50s when I was in Dhahran I never saw them, but I was told that there was a tremendous market in European and American, real pornographic films, that all the sheikhs and those that had money passed back and forth up and down the Gulf, you know.*

ALBIN: Well, I had a certain status to maintain, so I never looked into the steamier side of --

*Q: You didn't buy sex films for the Library of Congress?*

ALBIN: Let me get this straight. I did not buy sex films in Egypt for the Library of Congress, because as far as I could tell there was no porn industry. But again, I had a certain status to maintain, and I didn't go pushing the envelope, as they say.

*Q: I understand completely, but I was just being a little bit facetious, but --*

ALBIN: The blue movie industry didn't exist as far as I could tell. I know they existed in Turkey because Turkey was part of my assigned territory.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: And, and Turkey had a thriving, what you would call soft porn industry.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: A video industry. And what it's like today, I have no idea. Erdogan, Prime Minister Erdogan, has sort of Islamicized the country to the point where it might not be as public as it used to be.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: It used to be quite blatant, soft-core porn along with the shows and cabarets.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: But not absolute naked strip shows. But I -- as I say -- I was traveling on company business.

*Q: Oh yeah.*

ALBIN: Morocco's sexual mores were much looser in my observation and in the observation of many than most of the other Arab countries'. But I never saw *blatant* pornography.

*Q: Was Algeria -- this was back in 2007 -- was Algeria sort of a no man's land for you?*

ALBIN: Yes, it certainly was. I would have had to go way out of my way to travel there and then really way out of my way to really justify my going there in the first place, because it was dangerous, it was just not worth it. Besides, I was having too much fun in Egypt frankly.

*Q: How about Libya? This is high Gaddafi.*

ALBIN: Yeah. During my three or four month contract, I tried not to leave Egypt. I can't recall making any trips outside the country. The staff who worked in the office were -- let me describe the staff for just a minute. We had about 30 or 35 employees in 2007 unchanged from days of yore. About seven or eight of them were professional FSN's at or near the top of the FSN pay scale, Foreign Service National scale.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: I forget what the scale was. But they were thorough-going professionals, trustworthy, people with long experience, long dedication to the Library of Congress, some of whom I had hired years before. Some were new. But extremely trustworthy and well-trained librarians. So rather than me hog the fun trips to Lebanon or Tunisia for instance, I sent them out on collecting trips. They knew what they were doing, they were the ones who had cultivated the booksellers, publishers, and government officials and they had excellent cooperation from our embassies.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: So there was no reason for me to go. But the important thing was, Stu, with regard to Egyptian culture, I think I was the only person -- and I include Ricciardone in my remark here -- I was the only person who realized the utter freedom with which Egyptians were able to think and talk and write and film during that period. If that freedom had extended into subsequent years, the revolution of the Arab Spring might not have happened. Now, the old man, Mubarak, may have put the cap back on. I don't know. According to the protesters, there was an immense prison system, there was a corrupt judiciary system. Egypt, they said, was a police state. Could have been. I don't know. Don't know enough to tell you what happened after April 2007. I wasn't an eyewitness to anything after the spring of 2007.

*Q: Mm-hmm.*

ALBIN: But during my short period, Egypt seemed not to be a police state.

*Q: OK, well let's go back to 1985 and you're coming back to the States. Is that right?*

ALBIN: Yeah, we can do that. After --

*Q: What were you up to? We can always go back to these other periods.*

ALBIN: Understood.

*Q: If something comes to your mind.*

ALBIN: Yeah. I don't remember when I arrived here in the States in '85. It was probably in time for school to start, because I had a third grader and, and a first grader, or

kindergartener. So the objective was to get them into American schools. I think I told you why I left Egypt. The story of my daughter one day coming back from the British school. She was in second grade. Did I tell you that story, or not?

*Q: I'm not sure.*

ALBIN: OK, let me just repeat that right quick. Because I could have stayed in Egypt until this day, never retiring from the Library of Congress, having too much fun in Egypt and in the Middle East. However, one day after school we were having dinner, my wife, my daughter, and my son was too small to have part in this conversation. We were talking about "what'd you do at school today" kind of thing. And apropos of nothing she turned to me and said, "Daddy, I'm beginning to feel like a foreigner."

And I looked at my wife but didn't say anything. After dinner and the kids were put to bed, I said, "What do you think about that?"

And she said, "Oh, wasn't that a surprise? What do we do now?"

I said, "Well, I don't want to maroon these kids here when they don't want to be here, you know, that's not my intention. I'm having fun and you're abiding the Egyptians and you're having your brand of fun," because she had her place in the community. It was through the -- what do they call it -- Community Liaison Office?

*Q: Yeah, CLO.*

ALBIN: CLO. And all that. She was active in the community. She was active in the church, she was active in the embassy. So I said, "What do you think?"

She said, "Well, you know, if you want to leave, this may be a good time to do it." She was quite understanding.

And so the next day I called the boss in Washington. I said, "Rob," I said, "it's about time to think about coming home." I told him the story of the night before.

He said, "Mike," he said, "I've been waiting years for this phone call."

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: *(laughs)* So fortunately, Rob had just been promoted to a bigger job. And his job was coming open. So he said, "We'll do it -- we'll make sure that this works out," so I was able to take his place.

*Q: What was his job?*

ALBIN: His job was chief -- Now, this for the Library of Congress. This is not for State Department's records.

*Q: Well, we'll put it in.*

ALBIN: Yeah, we'll put it in just to complete the story. Rob Sullivan was his name. Rob was I think acting director for acquisitions at the time. And that's why he was my boss. Acquisitions including -- included overseas operations, our six offices overseas. His old job of chief of what was called in those days the Order Division was coming open, and they moved me from Cairo field director to chief of the Order Division. Order Division was the division that had the responsibility for buying the books for the Library of Congress. The best job in the world. I mean if Cairo was a good job, it was a good job because I was able to buy all the books from the Middle East. But as Order Division chief I was able to buy the books from the whole world. So that was a pretty neat job. And I had that job on and off for the next 20 years.

*Q: Well, let's talk about the basics of that. What did -- you were now back in the States. Did you see these foreign books -- how were they directed?*

ALBIN: OK, let's talk about that. Because this has a certain relevance. My job for the next 20 years, from '85 until I retired in 2004 as general administrator or manager. I had numerous jobs. But I always came back to the acquisitions cone or whatever you call it at State. Acquisitions at LOC means acquisitions of foreign books and other library materials, like maps, rare books, government documents, movies, sound recordings, etc. The Library of Congress acquires its US publications the old fashioned way. We steal the publications from authors and publishers by a process called copyright. So we don't have to buy American publications. We steal them from publishers. We say, "If you want your book copyrighted, give us a copy. And if you don't, then you're SOL."

*Q: Which means shit out of luck.*

ALBIN: That's correct. I had very little to do with American publications because that was the Copyright Office's business. And it's a taking, by the way, an unconstitutional taking that I have always opposed.

*Q: (laughs)*

ALBIN: *(laughs)*

*Q: Well, you don't copyright something without having an example of what you copyrighted.*

ALBIN: That's right. That's where the stealing, the theft comes in *(laughs)*. I used to tease everybody at the Library about that, including the Librarian. Foreign acquisitions and special acquisitions were my territory. And in one way or another I spent the next 20 years doing that kind of thing. One of the jobs that I had, because of my security clearance at the time, was liaison with the CIA for all kinds of publications that had to do with what is called gray publishing, the stuff that CIA was interested in that was not

commonly available on the market ... sci-tech publications that were available through trade shows around the world, for instance. The committee would instruct its people to go out and get that stuff. We worked through embassies on this. In the old days, as you remember -- you may have actually been one -- State Department had publications procurement officers and map procurement officers.

*Q: Oh yes, I've had many -- I never did, but I have many stories about -- apparently it's one of the great jobs particularly in Moscow of running around, going to the bookstores and buying --*

ALBIN: Good fun. Good fun.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: Well, I used to work with those guys when I was in Cairo.

*Q: By the way, before I forget it, was there anything the equivalent to in Soviet times of -- I may be pronouncing this wrong -- but the Samizdat?*

ALBIN: Samizdat.

*Q: Samizdat. This is the self-publication, using a mimeograph machine. In other words, things that were produced that you couldn't produce in a commercial book publishing company, but political pamphlets or novels, anything that would not pass the censors but was passed around by hand.*

ALBIN: I was up to my eyebrows in the Samizdat business. It was pretty interesting during the late '80s. In the late '80s, absolutely. Let's talk about that CIA thing. So CIA - State Department and CIA and Ag and Energy and Lord knows who else were interested in these publications. Some of them -- a lot of them were sci-tech. Some were maps. You used to have map procurement officers as well as publications procurement officers. Overseas I used to work with those people. Not as an ordinary day-to-day thing, but we would talk and we would trade, we would trade info about that stuff. It was usually over coffee at the embassy snack bar. "Did you know that the Egyptian National Institute for Statistics, had just published a census for Upper Egypt? For Sohag Province?" "No, I didn't know that." So we would trade bits of information like that. When I got back home I became the Library's representative the Gray Literature Committee, whatever the hell they called it, out in Reston where they had an office. And I'd go out there every month for their meetings until I got tired of the traffic on the Beltway and I said, "Somebody else do it. I don't want the hassle." So I did it for a year or two and then I handed it off to somebody else who had a security clearance commensurate with the requirement, somebody in our Science Division, as I recall. But by virtue of handing it off to a guy in the Science the Library lost any access to or knowledge of *non*-sci-tech-engineering stuff. Maps for example, or Samizdat literature, or political propaganda. Because all the sci-tech guy wanted was industrial and scientific material. He wasn't the least bit interested in anything else. So the other elements of



publishing went begging, *until* about 19 -- about -- I don't know exactly when. The Librarian of Congress, James Billington, was a Russia-ologist. Not necessarily a Sovietologist, but a Russiaologist. Because of his competency and great learning in the Russian history, I guess he was a Sovietologist as well. His interest was in not letting anything coming out of the USSR slip through our fingers. So because I was the guy who did foreign acquisitions, I was the guy appointed to run our -- let's call it our Samizdat office in Moscow. In order to do this I had to identify a contractor in Moscow. Now, we were approaching the days of Glasnost. We were in Gorbachev's era, winding down the Cold War. When I started this new territory, this whole activity, we were not buddy-buddy with Russia yet, but we soon became buddy-buddy. Billington, again, by virtue of his stature as a scholar, was a frequent visitor to the Soviet Union. On one of his trips he identified a guy whose name was Mikha'il (Misha) Levner who was an employee of the State Library in Moscow. He had reasonably good English. Billington's Russian was fluent so he really didn't need English. But for purposes of a long-term association English was a requirement. Misha had a foot in both the sci-tech camp, I think he was trained as an engineer, and in the literary camp. Because as a Jew and through other associations he was interested in politics. As politics got looser -- more loosey-goosey, he followed affairs closely. Anyway, he impressed Billington as a guy who could cover the territory for us. So Billington came home from one junket or another and said "Let's contract Misha Levner to be our bibliographic representative -- that's what we called them officially -- bibliographic representatives.

Since I was the contracting officer worldwide for stuff like this, I said, "OK, we'll go for it." I was on the phone with Misha telexing and faxing and doing whatever the technology allowed. We finally got him on board as a contractor. I don't remember the dates, to be honest with you, Stu, but let's say -- let's say '86 to around 2000. For the first years of his contract he was very successful. He did a wonderful job. I went over to Moscow a couple of times to get him oriented to what he wanted and brief him on fiscal detail and so forth. We went around to all the state agencies that were shrinking as monolithic Soviet operations. They didn't know what they were doing, they had publications stacked, as I described last week, publications stacked ceiling high. We'd go into an office and fill our laundry bags with publications. I spent some delightful times with Misha. We took trips up too -- or at least one trip, I don't remember any more than one -- up to the newly renamed St. Petersburg. That was good fun and very productive. Misha was a good learner, a real quick study. Because I was a contracting officer and because the Library had gotten into trouble with its internal auditor about the time I was coming back from overseas on some contract tomfoolery that they got caught doing, they got caught misusing funds -- the Library got caught misusing funds on behalf of the U.S. Navy. The U.S. Navy was laundering moneys through the Library to do stuff that was not in our authorization, or theirs, if you get my drift. In any case, they were caught at it. There was a big fuss. I think it got into the *Post*. Well anyway, as contracting officer, I didn't want that to happen to me. So I was always a *very* careful contracting officer. I took courses and I boned up on what I should be doing. In order to monitor Levner, which was a very high profile contract for us -- I mean I was running contracts all over the world, but Levner was the highest profile because the Librarian wanted this guy. Because the Soviet Union in its declining years was a headline, spotlight place I wanted

everything clean. Any auditor coming in would find our records perfectly shipshape. So I set up a committee to monitor Levner. I had Levner come to the U.S. a couple of times to work with us to see that he got a good dose of contract dos and don'ts. The arrangement worked fine for several years but then it went south. I won't go into the details because it's not appropriate for State Department. But if the Library ever asks me for a memoir I will detail how there was plenty not to like about the arrangement as time went on.

I said to my boss, "From now on I am not signing off on annual renewals. Levner is not doing what he's paid to do. If you and the General Counsel don't have the guts to tell Billington that he's not following the contract – that this is a waste of money-- and you don't want me to tell him, because I'll be glad to do it, then you sign the contract renewals every year yourself. I'm not going to do it, because I don't want my name on that contract." So sure enough, for the next two or three years my boss signed the contracts. Thereafter, I had nothing to do with the Levner contract, because guess why? Levner never sent us one single newspaper or any library material during those years. I washed my hands of it.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: So Samizdat. Samizdat I would say was one of the fun territories that Levner and I got into as time went on. As Glasnost took hold under Gorbachev, Samizdat became less and less necessary in Russia. If you had a bellyache you could go on television to talk about your grievances. The press and media opened up.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: But it was fun while it lasted. Yeah.

*Q: How about -- did you run a -- you know, looking at the worldwide system, where were your, I'll focus on trouble spots for collections?*

ALBIN: Here's a complaint I've got, so I'll vent a little bit. It has to do with a small area of my activity at the time. This business of sanctions...when Congress and Treasury come in to say, "You may not do business with Cuba and you may not do business with Iran, or you may not do business with North Korea." Well, what are the countries that people need to get publications from? Iran and North Korea and Cuba, of course. I would fight those rulings with our General Counsel time and time again. And he would wave some Treasury directive at me and I would say, "To hell with the Treasury. We are Legislative Branch. We don't have to follow those rules."

And, and he'd say, "Oh yes we do." Nice try, but end of discussion.

And I would -- I'd complain to Dr. Billington about this. He didn't have guts enough to go to Congress to get any kind of waiver. He didn't want to run interference for us. So Iran, for example, is the best example going right now. We can't get publications out of Iran.

*Q: Yeah, I can immediately see the collision.*

ALBIN: Yeah, I thought it was stupid. Now, so that's a trouble spot and that's something that has to be corrected by Congress. You can embargo Iran or Cuba all you want. I don't care. I don't care about getting phosphates from Iran or oil from Iran or sugarcane from Cuba. I don't care about that stuff. But get the stuff that really counts, and that's the *intellectual production* of the country.

*Q: Well, I mean I would think that there would be an intelligence proviso. You know, saying OK, these, these documents are part of our intelligence Cold War, anti North Korean effort. So we'll get these under that proviso.*

ALBIN: You'd think, wouldn't you? And remember, my connection with the CIA's publications procurement operation. So I tried to use that as a possible avenue -- but it was verboten as well. I mean they blocked me at every turn.

*Q: What -- well, looking at the worldwide thing, were there any peculiarities or either difficulties or funny things or anything --*

ALBIN: Yeah, there were plenty -- there were plenty of peculiarities. But let me talk about one that was particularly successful but turned unfortunately to be short-lived. It had to do with a very interesting project I had involving Japanese publications. In those days, Japan was riding high, late '80s, into the '90s, before the Japanese economy went to hell. Everybody was as afraid of Japan's takeover of the United States as we are of China's today. And so we all recognized -- Americans recognized, Congress recognized, the Executive Branch recognized that the Japanese were eating our lunch technologically. So what to do about it? We have an outfit in the Library of Congress called the Congressional Research Service (CRS). It provides Congress confidential research on topics the Congress asks specifically to be briefed on. CRS personnel consider themselves, rightly or wrongly, the Prince Charmings of the Library of Congress. They don't really belong to the rest of us, to the Library as a whole. It's just by historical happenstance that they got lodged with the Library. Kind of like the Copyright Office. So CRS does its own business and I rarely had much to do with them. I had personal friends there, but I didn't have any institutional reason for interaction. Then, along comes Japan and congressional concern about Japanese technological advance and inventiveness. You can't believe the depth of congressional concern about Japanese technology. So Congress was hammering CRS with questions about why they are so innovative and productive. What's the Japanese secret? The Japanese experts at CRS approached the Library and the Japanese government about a deal to create access for the Library to special technical material -- patents, for example, and research and development reports from big Japanese companies like Mitsubishi and Toyota and from electronics firms, large and small. So for the first time in Library of Congress history a partnership was set up between the main Library and CRS to attack the Japan problem. The goal was to find a way to systematically access Japanese sci-tech literature. I was charged with working with CRS

to find a partner in Japan for these special acquisitions. The partner turned out to be the National Diet Library, which is the national library of Japan, the Diet being the legislature of Japan. The National Diet Library said, "Sure, we'll be glad to help you out." And they did. They did a wonderful job. The Library has always had a marvelous association with the National Diet Library. Very collegial, very professional. We helped set up NDL after the Second World War. The Library was the midwife and godmother of the National Diet Library. And the NDL appreciates it.

*Q: Mm-hmm.*

ALBIN: So now we had a Japanese partner. I had traditionally done a lot of business, a couple hundred thousand dollars every year, buying Japanese books with something called JPTC, the Japan Publications Trading Corporation. They were willing to partner with us as well. So we had two powerful partners, one was on the commercial side, one was on the governmental side. What we needed now was money. CRS didn't have any money and the Library didn't either. So I think Billington or someone stepped in to help find funds. Who was ambassador at that time? Mike Mansfield, I think.

*Q: I think Mike Mansfield.*

ALBIN: Yeah. So Mansfield -- knowing more about Congress than anybody in our Diplomatic Corps, -- did his best to engineer relations through the Japanese Foreign Ministry, to fund this. There was something at the time called the Abe Foundation named after Foreign Minister, perhaps Prime Minister Abe, who had provided lots of money to this cultural foundation The Abe Foundation, through I guess Mansfield and Billington, agreed to fund our enterprise. We had a very complex bureaucratic administrative structure that allowed us access to any corporation, any government think tank, any Japanese research center to gather their publications in physics, chemistry, aeronautics, materials engineering, pharmaceuticals, etc. The project got underway pretty rapidly considering the administrative complexities. NDL got one copy of each publication (mostly "gray literature") for its collections, and we got the second copy. Our copy would go to JPTC, the Japan Publications Trading Corporation. NDL then microfilmed or digitized the publications and provided the film or digits to LC. In this way LC acquired a copy of every patent and technical report ever published by a Japanese government institution, university, or private corporation. It was an amazing thing, very innovative. We called it the Japan Documentation Center. It operated successfully for several years, until the Abe Foundation ran aground fiscally along with the rest of Japan. It didn't have any money to fund the project any longer. The intention at the outset was to have Congress start pitching in, incrementally contributing to the funding. Eventually Congress would include it in LC's appropriation request. This never happened. So the Japan Documentation Center is now out of business. It was a project that for me was the high point of my 20-year career as an acquisitions administrator. I had many high points, by the way, that had to do with internal Library's organization and administration but I'll save those reminiscences for elsewhere. The Japanese project and the, Moscow experience, were probably the two big international things that I was involved in.

*Q: What about China?*

ALBIN: China was business as usual and continues to be business as usual. China was a communist country then, it's a communist country now as far as publications are concerned. As of 2004, my retirement year, China was a no-problem country. We weren't allowed into any secret stuff, but anything that was not secret we acquired by the ton through a state-operated company called some big Chinese bureaucratic acronym: CNPITC, the China National Publication Industry Trading Corporation or some such name. It was modeled after the Soviet Union's centralized distribution service.

*Q: What about the tremendous changes: librarian, digitation, internet? I mean, how did that impact you all?*

ALBIN: Yes, if and when I do this kind of recording for the Library that will take up 60% of what I will cover, because I was in the acquisitions arena at the very time when digitization was breaking all the rules, breaking all the traditions. My colleagues and I, all over the library were responsible for figuring out how to accommodate ourselves to the new digital age. Some of the most exciting -- well, let me get back to the Japan Documentation Center for a moment. Setting up of the documentation center and operating it required my going back and forth to Japan more or less frequently. Nobody, including me, understood how it should work. There were many players and lots of moving parts.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: I mean the Japanese didn't understand it, nor the Americans. I was the only one they dealt with because CRS being, you know, the Prince Charmings, didn't want to deal with details like contracts and things like that. So I was the only one who actually knew what I wanted and what was legal. I was always in link with the General Counsel, first, to assure legality and, second, to be convenient for me to administer. So those were my desiderata. I would go over to Japan meet with all of the players. There was one guy from the Foreign Ministry -- I can't remember his name -- but he was the top representative. He had his representatives from the Abe Foundation, because they had the money. And I'll tell you Stu, those sessions with the Japanese across the table talking money and other details were the hardest negotiations I have ever had in my life. Negotiations with Arab publishers and book agents were a piece of cake compared to the Japanese. They had to be cajoled out of funds, and talked into breaking patters of administration by engaging in a real bi-national joint venture. It was horrible. They were very tough negotiators. But they were amazingly hospitable too. At the end of every session, all the tension relaxed. We would go out to dinner and to drink. Everything was forgotten until the next morning when the haggling would start all over again.

*Q: OK. But now --*

ALBIN: All right, so your question, your question had to do with digitization, which was, which was -- let me --

*Q: OK. I thought we'd sort of finish this and pick up your post-retirement things another time.*

ALBIN: OK, good. What to talk about in regard to digitization? Digitization changed all the rules, changed all the paradigms and traditions. It became clear to me in the acquisitions business that acquiring paper publications was easy. You bought a book, you catalogued it, and put it on the shelf. If you wanted to, you could take the book off the shelf, read it, put it back on the shelf -- real simple. All of a sudden, paper doesn't exist anymore. Publishers are going digital. We didn't know in those days -- I don't have dates, I haven't thought this thing through -- but let's say, let's say 1990. Let's use 1990 as a launch date. In 1990, there were manufacturers out there, Sony, and maybe some old names, companies that have gone out of business, RCA (Radio Corporation of America) were going digital. What the hell is digital and what does it mean to the Library of Congress? We were talking to Sony and later to Google and other companies. Was the book going digital? Magazines? Newspapers? Voice and image? All was in flux. What were the copyright implications? How was storage and retrieval going to be handled? Was Congress going to pay for these publications or acquire them via copyright?

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: There were early Kindle-like inventions. Many failed. The GPO, the Government Printing Office, was also rapidly abandoning paper. What? Abandoning paper? They've got this huge building down on North Capital, an immense monster of a building with a monster payroll, totally unionized, totally featherbedded. It seemed like every employee had his own labor union. We did huge business with GPO but they were evolving away from paper as fast as they could, regardless of the unions. I wished LC could change as fast. GPO is just one example of what was happening.

*Q: I might say that digitization, as we are talking yours and my interview is being recorded digitally, where before it'd been on cassettes. Digitalization, I've got two little machines here digitizing the hell out of this.*

ALBIN: (laughs) That's right.

*Q: OK.*

ALBIN: So in 1990, my colleagues and I didn't know anything about any of this.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: But the Library of Congress of course is the one institution in the world that collects everything, by popular lore. We don't of course, but anyway, we wanted to be as complete digitally as we are paperly. But how to go about this? I'll give you an example

that will I hope demonstrates the problem. Everybody knows University Microfilms, right?

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: Most universities in the country submit their dissertations and masters theses to university microfilms, the famous place on Zeeb Road in Ann Arbor, Michigan. They dutifully take the dissertations that were lovingly created by all these PhD's and MA's and they microfilm them. The microfilms are stored on Zeeb Road in Ann Arbor. If you want to read my thesis you can go to your library, search my name, find the dissertation, and order a copy in paper or microfilm from UM. Simple as that. People have done it for years. The Library of Congress doesn't collect dissertations. So if somebody writes a dissertation in the history department at George Mason University, that dissertation does not go to the Library of Congress. If the dissertation is published by George Mason University Press, then we will get it the old fashioned way, by stealing it from George Mason University Press under the copyright theft law. But the dissertation itself goes to Zeeb Road, to UMI, University of Microfilms, and they are kind of like the national library for dissertations, the national depository. OK. It became clear in discussion with University Microfilms that they were no longer going to microfilm dissertations; they were going to digitize them. The entire library of dissertations was going to be digitized, so there wouldn't be any microfilm anymore. Oh, how was this to work? Around 2000, 1998, 2000, I don't remember exactly, my boss and I started negotiating with UMI. By the way, UMI used to be a standalone corporation. Like every other element of the ever-evolving publishing industry, it was bought out by companies like Springer Verlag, Elsevier, or Prentice Hall, so Lord knows who owns them now. Maybe they're back as a nonprofit organization. Anyway, this merry-go-round was happening while we were getting word that UMI was going to change the format of its dissertation management. We were concerned that we would lose access to dissertations or that access would become too expensive for us. So I started to talk to UMI to try to figure out what they were going to do. Meanwhile, UMI itself was not an independent actor anymore. Corporations now owned it. In the old days they used to have a lot of elbow room because they were independent. Now they were part of a big corporate entity with its own lawyers and accountants, boards of directors, and stockholders. This slowed negotiations terribly. We too had our bureaucratic problems internally with our General Counsel and our budgeting process, and so forth. Anyway, conversations proceeded and my boss was keen to see that we didn't drop the ball on this because it was an important high profile acquisitions matter. So we developed a concept called the "trusted repository." University of Microfilms became one of the first guinea pigs for the concept of the trusted repository. You give us your publications -- forget the format for just a minute -- you give us your publications and we will hold them as a trusted repository, making them available to the public, and to Congress, of course. Congress first, federal government second, and, and the public third, all in accordance with very tight specifications that we all had to live by. The Library would share ownership and rights use in the publications, in the documents. I shouldn't call them publications. In the documents. Many nonprofit outfits or, or public service outfits agreed to talk with us along those lines. So when we finally got an agreement signed with UMI it was along the following lines. You guys go

ahead and digitize your collections retrospectively and currently, but don't destroy the microfilm. The Library of Congress will take the microfilm in a depository arrangement so that the film won't be destroyed. We signed the agreement about the time I retired, 2004. The physical films would stay in Ann Arbor as a closed archive. Because everything past and future will be digitized nobody will need those microfilms anymore. If anybody wants to buy a hard copy, UMI will produce and sell it from the digitized copy. The Library is not involved in that transaction. As new dissertations are digitized, our collection, Library of Congress's collection will be enhanced by those recently digitized titles, not for public sale in any way, but only for use on site by that group of users that I just outlined: the Congress, the federal government, and the general public, if they have their butt in a seat at a computer terminal in the Library of Congress. No remote access. No Internet distribution. That's the way this trusted repository worked. UMI was the first such arrangement in accommodation of the digital age.

*Q: Well now, Library of Congress is obviously located in Washington D.C. Had there been any effort to make -- particularly with digitization and all, you know, the equivalent to a place to put your butt in Seattle or Chicago or --*

ALBIN: No.

*Q: Was there any talk of doing that?*

ALBIN: I would have to defer to Dr. Billington on that.

*Q: Yeah, but it would seem to be --*

ALBIN: Nothing ever came of it.

*Q: It would seem to be in the offing at some point.*

ALBIN: It may have been.

*Q: Above your pay grade.*

ALBIN: Yeah, and it wouldn't have affected what I was doing in acquisitions anyway. The idea never came to anything as far as I know. Now, let me explain too. Those six field officers, Nairobi, Jakarta, Delhi, Islamabad, Cairo, and Rio, those six field officers were not Library of Congress "international branches." They were acquisitions offices.

*Q: Clearly, yes.*

ALBIN: I think I made that clear at the outset.

*Q: What about -- did the Internet have any impact on your operation?*



ALBIN: I have talked about the trusted repository. That was a concept that by the time I'd left the Library was catching on in the nonprofit publishing industry. And we were making attempts to convince publishers, for-profit publishers, to consider the concept. What became of it, I don't know. I'd have to go back to the library and talk to some old buddies about its fate. However, Internet publishing or digitized publishing was from 1990 on, to this day, a big headache for Library of Congress. Copyright is the main censoring mechanism, the main road block to universal distribution. Let's just limit this to American publications. So the universe of American publications is as critical today in the electronic age as it was in the paper age. In fact, it's more critical because publishers are doing away with paper. That means you, Stu, the library user, the reader, are blocked from access to your publication by a particularly insidious form of censorship that I personally am in favor of. And it's called copyright. In other words, you can't have access to the universe of publications because you haven't paid for that right. And Library of Congress hasn't figured out a way to allow access to digitized commercial publications.

*Q: Well, in a way fair enough. I mean after all, you publish a book you want -- you know, I've got a couple books out there. And not that -- I get, you know, maybe \$15 a year, but.*

ALBIN: But they're your dollars!

*Q: Yeah, they're my dollars.*

ALBIN: (laughs)

*Q: OK, well I'm thinking this is a good place to stop.*

ALBIN: That was a good question on digitization. But it's a humongous, unresolved question, Stu.

*Q: And I mean we'll -- our collection -- at one point we were selling it. We've stopped that a long time ago, because we just want to get the information out. We give a copy of our oral history transcripts, including yours, to the Library of Congress. But quite frankly, the Library of Congress does such a poor job of making them searchable that we have also put them on our own website. I mean it's, it, it, it's a -- I, I've been sort of shocked at how sort of antediluvian or whatever the phrase is --*

ALBIN: That's exactly the phrase.

*Q: Yeah. The treatment, because you'd think the Library of Congress would have a very good search engine of the documents.*

ALBIN: It's one of the reasons I retired, because it was impossible to get it through the thick heads of the people who run the Library that it is antediluvian. I used to call it the most sclerotic institution in all of Washington. And there are some doozies in this town.

*Q: Yeah. Well, maybe eventually --*

ALBIN: And I want you to repeat this. This is music to my ears.

*Q: Yeah. Well, there we are. But, but I mean we still, for the prestige and the durability we hope of the Library of Congress, we do want these to be on, on the record and be there.*

ALBIN: It's appropriate that it be here.

*Q: But, but for the use of scholars and all, I think they'll find ours much more responsive.*

ALBIN: I do.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: I brought this issue up constantly during my career at the Library but it never went anywhere. I had some great assignments at the Library and I enjoyed great trust and great respect there as a manager and administrator. But as to innovation I accomplished little.

*Q: Mm-hmm.*

ALBIN: As far as promotion was concerned. And you know why? Because I told it like it was.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: I would be in meetings and emphasize that we don't know how fast the publishing and digital industries were changing. As far as I know, we don't know what Sony is doing, or Amazon, or Pro-Quest. We know little about how universities here and abroad are turning the world upside down. One time my boss came back from a meeting. He says, "We're going to have a university!" It was a big fad at the time for corporations to have a 'university.' It was a meeting at Raytheon, if I recall correctly, on some big sci-tech subject. "Raytheon's got a university, SAIC has a university, Boeing has a university. We're going to have one at Library of Congress," he said. So we had to get our behinds in gear and put on mortar boards and gowns to think about how to do a university. Nothing ever came of it.

*Q: Yeah. OK, well Mike, let's -- what I'd like to do is pick up. First place, if you make note of anything that you haven't covered in the period we've talked about, up through your retirement --*

ALBIN: Right.

*Q: -- that we might cover the next session. But also, then afterwards, because you got involved in our -- in the Middle East again.*

ALBIN: Yes, I did.

*Q: And so we'll pick it up then.*

ALBIN: Yes, OK good. That was a completely different career.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: A career that lasted only four years, but it was chock full of goodness.

*Q: All right. Today is the 19th of June, 2013 with Mike Albin. And Mike, we've got you as a, a retiree now.*

ALBIN: Yes, that's correct.

*Q: You retired when?*

ALBIN: I retired October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2004.

*Q: And so, so what were you planning to do, and what happened?*

ALBIN: Well, I'll be a little personal here -- because my wife, who had cancer, was given about a year to live. So she and I were going to spend her last year, beginning on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2004, doing whatever she wanted to do. And as it turned out sadly, she lasted probably she lasted about six weeks rather than 12 months. So in any case, I didn't have any plan for retirement. I had an absorbing avocation, hobby, if you will. I was a baseball umpire. And it took a lot of time, because at my level of umpiring in those days, when I was just getting out of the youth baseball umpiring into the NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) college level of umpiring. That took a lot of travel and it took a lot of preparation and training and so forth. So it occupied my time at least several days a week. I had to drive to -- Lord, I don't know, to Charlottesville, Virginia or to Annapolis, Maryland. There was also youth baseball here in Northern Virginia and Maryland, which was always a heavy schedule as were men's leagues. I also did a little reading and research, writing and research, historical research, but nothing significant, and nothing of a book length nature. My kids were out of the house by that time and had jobs of their own. One day I was coming off the baseball field with my umpire partner. We were walking toward the parking lot over at Wakefield High School. This would have been the summer, July, August, of '07. And he said to me as we were changing clothes in the parking lot, he said, "Mike, what do you do?"

And I said, "I teach Arabic," because -- oh, that was another thing I did. I had a little business going as a private tutor for Modern Standard Arabic. People would come to me for their Arabic lessons. I had a system that guaranteed that they would be reading a

newspaper in less than a year. And in every case, except one or two, I was as good as my word. My product was my best advertisement. I had three requirements of students when I interviewed them to sit with me: they must be adults; they must have a career reason for learning Arabic; and they must do their homework unfailingly. If I noticed that they were sloughing off and coming to my lessons unprepared then I would stop the lessons. I'd fire them. That didn't happen very often because they were motivated and they could feel their progress. So I did a lot of tutoring. Some of my students are still in touch with me. They've done very well. One of them works for an Intel agency in the Gulf, and the other one's working on his PhD at the University of Maryland, and others are scattered around the bureaucracy here and there. Very satisfying work. Not very lucrative, but intellectually satisfying. So I said to my fellow umpire, "I teach Arabic."

And he said, "Oh, that's interesting. Would you like to go to Iraq?"

And I said, "When's the next plane?"

We started to talk seriously. He said, "Send me your resume," which I did by the end of the day.

He started the ball rolling for my recruitment into the Army in a program called the Human Terrain System, HTS. It was a new program in 2007, operated by the Army to infuse cultural understanding, in this case of Iraq and Afghanistan, among the officers and deployed combat brigades in the two countries. Let me give you a short chronology of where we're going today and in the next session. I started with Human Terrain System in the fall of 2007, when I reported for duty at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. I deployed to Iraq, let us say May of '08 after significant training. I stayed in Iraq for my first deployment from May of '08 to the end of '08, or the beginning of '09. I'm going to be shaky on the dates. I didn't go back to my diaries to check this out. I came back home and, redeployed, as they say. I was a contractor with BAE Systems. BAE had the contract with the Army for the Human Terrain System in Fort Leavenworth and ran the program at Ft. Leavenworth. I returned home and resigned from BEA and from the Army. I sat at home, put my shingle up for Arabic teaching again, although I didn't have any students yet, when I got a phone call from Ft. Leavenworth asking if I would teach and do program development. I signed another contract and taught at Leavenworth in '09 and 2010. In 2010, I rejoined HTS because I got bored with teaching. I entered training again -- they had to retrain me because it was an Army procedure, although I was already a trainer. There were bureaucratic reasons. And I deployed again to Iraq for about a year in 2010, I quit in June of 2011. I redeployed (came home) in 2011 and really retired. I haven't really been much employed since. So that's the chronology of my association with the Army's Human Terrain System. Let me explain what Human Terrain System was intended to be.

*Q: All right, well let's start, you go to Fort Leavenworth to get your training.*

ALBIN: Yes.

*Q: What are they -- I mean and this'll be telling again, what the Human Terrain System was, is, and what -- how you were trained. What you were picking up.*

ALBIN: Yeah, that's an excellent question. The system was new. They didn't have the slightest idea what they were doing. BEA got the contract. Fort Leavenworth is a significant training center, one of the Army's academic centers and a kind of Army think tank. You don't see any howitzers or tanks or helicopters at Fort Leavenworth. You have a college campus atmosphere. There was a lot of intellectual give and take over what was becoming the regnant army doctrine at the time, called COIN, Counterinsurgency, C-O-I-N for short. COIN was what we studied in the courses, as a strategic and tactical subject. Middle Eastern and Islamic history culture was what we studied as cultural subjects. Arabic, the Iraqi dialect of Arabic was what we studied as a linguistic subject. Those were the main segments of the training program that took several months. Many trainees left of their own accord or were fired.

*Q: These were all civilians.*

ALBIN: I would say 90% of those sixty people were civilians. The Army people the--greensuiters as they were called--were generally speaking officers in CA, that is Civil Affairs. So we had a mix of experienced CA officers, academic PhD's from various social sciences and humanities disciplines, some retired non-commissioned officers at the master sergeant level, and a group of young people who were fresh from graduate schools with their MA's from Middle Eastern studies programs, Georgetown, UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles), University of Michigan, and so forth. We were all trained along the same lines. I was exempted from the language courses. That gave me the opportunity to do extended reading in what I was weakest at, Army lore and culture. The 90% of us who were civilians with no military background needed deep orientation to Army thinking, procedures, and etiquette. We knew nothing about how the army worked, especially how combat units worked. After those months of training we knew as much as we ever wanted to know about Army culture. It was fascinating, the most absorbing element of training because it was so foreign to me. I was constantly in the library reading, reading modern stuff and the classics like Clausewitz, Lao Tzu, and everything that an Army officer would have read at the Command and General Staff College library. Probably more than a West Pointer would have read, because those guys are all coming out as lieutenants and engineers not as strategic or tactical thinkers or foreign policy people with master's degrees.

I was really impressed at Leavenworth, with the Army's organization, its commitment to open-minded learning, to free and easy give and take in the classroom, to the lack of starchiness among our professors and my colleagues. It was just a wonderful exposure to Army culture and I value that very much.

As far as COIN was concerned, it was the regnant doctrine. We got a heavy dose of it. We did a lot of reading, a lot of discussion, we had a lot of people who had COIN experience come in and talk at us about what it meant to run counterinsurgency operations, and how the Army was transforming itself at that time. That is to say, as a

result of 9/11 and Afghanistan -- the developing war in Afghanistan. By 2007 when I joined up, it was not a developing war any more, it was a full-fledged war, as was Iraq. COIN had superseded Cold War strategy in the thinking of our professors, counselors, and resource people. The Army was no longer talking about the Fulda Gap or throw weights or MIRVs (multiple independently targeted reentry vehicles). We weren't talking about any of that stuff. We were talking about hearts and minds. We were talking about the British experience in Malaysia, and about T. E. Lawrence and Glubb Pasha in the Middle East. We were talking about David Galula in Algeria, FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) in Latin America and Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka.

*Q: And CORDS (Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support) in Vietnam.*

ALBIN: And CORDS -- a good dose of CORDS in Vietnam. A very impressive group of people came in to talk to us about the new kind of war, not a word about an Abrams tanks or any of the old fashioned heavy machinery that the army was retooling into the new era of insurgency, nontraditional war. We read all the modern classics, David Kilcullen, Galula, and oh my gosh, I should have glanced at my shelf coming over here. But in any case, lots of these people are in my library now that never were before. I think I mentioned to you weeks ago that my preparation for the Peace Corps was not half bad. This army experience so many decades later was much better than that. It was intensive and serious. Almost everybody who stayed with the program took it very seriously.

*Q: But you -- you know, our conversations, you spent a lot of time talking about the stupidity, the wrong approach and all, in government in the Middle East. Did you feel that the army was beginning to put it together quite --*

ALBIN: Well, I'm going to come to that. Because I'm very ambivalent about the Army and my experience. My experience overseas with the Army in Iraq and only in Iraq -- when I tried later to get to Afghanistan, I got the rug pulled out from under me at least twice. I'll touch briefly on that, but later on. In Iraq, I saw great things on the part of the Army and its bureaucracy and administration, and commitment to the mission. But I saw some real bonehead stuff too. Let me just mention that the training I received during those early months at Leavenworth and later on in 2010, again at Leavenworth, started me thinking that there's a better way of approaching cultural studies than the way the Army was doing it for the Human Terrain System. The first time around I cut the army some slack in that the HTS was a brand new, experimental program. They had never done anything like this before, especially injecting civilians in and amongst combat military units.

*Q: Quick question. Why the hell are they called the Human Terrain System?*

ALBIN: Because it's the Army being tone deaf.

*Q: OK.*

ALBIN: *(laughs)*

*Q: As a veteran I'll accept that.*

ALBIN: Could they come up with a less salubrious, a less --

*Q: Well, I don't know the -- you know, HR, Human Resources, is supposed to be more people oriented than personnel. Human Resources sounds like people are objects which will be moved around, computer-wise.*

ALBIN: That's right.

*Q: Anyway --*

ALBIN: Many of us fought to change the name -- to this day I'm embarrassed by the term. Some of the Army officers up top, some of the leaders of the program did not seem to understand our concern was about this very unpleasant term. They didn't understand how it would be received by our academic colleagues, for example, or civilian bureaucratic colleagues, or the media.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: *(laughs)* I'm glad you raised that, because it was a subject of a lot of debate. Now, the various segments of our group were as follows. There were going to be team leaders, each one in charge of a human terrain team (HTT) -- here's another acronym, an HTT, a Human Terrain Team, belongs to HTS, Human Terrain System. In Iraq, when I served there the first time there maybe twenty HTT's. We were scattered all around the country. Some were in and around Baghdad, some of them, like me, were outside of Baghdad. We were all over the place. We were attached to combat brigades. Each team was composed of, ideally, a team leader or two, a social scientist or two, and human terrain analysts, maybe three or four of these. The human terrain analysts were, generally speaking, Arab-Americans fluent in Arabic and who could act as translators and cultural interpreters at a very grassroots level. I'll go into some of these details. At the HR stage of recruitment, when the personnel office got involved in putting out the advertisement for recruitment, they scooped up a lot of people who were not qualified. So of the sixty people who came to training at Leavenworth, maybe forty of us deployed, maybe fewer, I don't recall exactly.

*Q: What made a person non-qualified, in your opinion?*

ALBIN: A lot of them deselected themselves because the course of training was too rigorous for them. Many at the human terrain analyst level didn't like to read. They were not educated people. They couldn't sit still in a classroom or they didn't know how to behave themselves in a seminar atmosphere, they had never done any analytical writing, or any writing in English at all for that matter. So they quit or were dismissed. Some people were psychologically unprepared for interaction with the Army. They simply did

not like a bunch of greensuiters or analysts yammering at them about CORDS, for example. They would come in with a chip on their shoulder about Vietnam. So any time CORDS was mentioned they mutter and grumble. These people just drifted away or they were asked to leave.

There were a lot of misfits among this human terrain analysts. Let me give you an example of what I mean, because it was the bane of my existence when I actually deployed the first time. The typical human terrain analyst was an Arab-American of anywhere from 30 to 60 years of age who was an automobile mechanic. The few schoolteachers in the group would be considered major intellectuals. But there was hardly anybody of even that caliber of academic preparation. I used to call them falafel makers from Detroit, because of the large Iraqi-American community in Detroit. They worked in the automobile factories in and around Detroit and Dearborn.

*Q: That's a center. I mean Detroit has a huge Arab population.*

ALBIN: Indeed. Some of them were very committed to the effort and I still correspond with some, but most of them were not worth the money they were being paid, and the program recognized that before deployment. Many of them were asked to go home, but many slipped through the screening. I must say that there were people both at that level, the falafel maker level, and, and also at the academic and/or retired military level, who were in it simply for the money. There was a great deal of money involved. I don't remember what the salary and other compensation was but when I got back home from my first deployment and had to pay my income tax, let me tell you, I could have funded a small government agency with what I paid in taxes that year. Anyway, we made a lot of money. It was very attractive from that point of view.

*Q: I have to say, I spent 18 months in Saigon during the war with the embassy. And many civilian contractors -- I mean money -- and well, State Department money was a major factor in getting people to, to go there.*

ALBIN: Yes. I have strong opinions about that. When I joined the program the first time, I was paid at my former GS (General Schedule) rate. I was considered a social scientist, although I have no PhD in social sciences, because of my academic background in language study, my knowledge of the Middle East, and my managerial and administrative background. They, they ranked me at my old GS rank. I was satisfied. That made me a colonel, an 06, as the military terms it. That was great because that meant I'd get priority when we were scheduling helo missions (helicopters). I could bump somebody to get some place in a hurry. But it didn't really make any difference otherwise except in the pay envelope. The second time around the HR people had reclassified the social scientist position to 05. That was OK with me because my object in joining HTS was not the paycheck.

*Q: Out of 60.*



ALBIN: Out of 60, something like that. In terms of relevancy to what we were expected to do in, in-country, I would say it was pretty good. There was also category called research manager that was supposed to be a techy-type person. Each team was supposed to have somebody who knew how to operate computers and telecoms. So there were actually four cones, if I may call them that. Each of these people with whom I was deployed had certain strengths. We made a great team. When I left for my deployment I was called -- in those days I was called co-team leader. The real team leader was a guy named John Townsend. He was in my group and we trained together. By drawing straws or numbers out of a hat, I was assigned to his team, or he was assigned to my team. He was really the team leader because John was a first class army officer. He had retired a couple of years before as a major in the Rangers, and had been in every war since he enlisted at age 18. When I met him he was perhaps 42 or something like that. He'd been to Grenada, been to Panama, been to, to every place we fought, he was jumping out of airplanes and doing something in Desert Storm, but I forget what exactly. He is a wonderful guy both as a personal friend and as a mentor as far as the Army was concerned, a great guy to be deployed with in very difficult circumstances. I'd set down one rule with John and with the team in general. I said, "John, I'm co-team leader here, not because I was qualified, but simply because that's what they called me. I'm co-team leader and I'm going to give you an order."

And he says, "What's that, Mike?" Everybody was together in our workroom.

I said, "Never call me 'pops' and or 'grandpa,' all right?" (*laughs*). "And don't ever cut me any slack about going out with a pack on my back or going to someplace difficult."

He says, "All right, OK. I've made a mental note of it."

All of us hit Iraq at the same time. We were an early group in the HTS project. When you introduce something new the brigade colonels, they don't know what to do with it. This is the way with bureaucracies. It was true of automation and digitization at the Library of Congress and it was true in spades with the Army and HTS. Managers fear anything that's new.

*Q: Oh --*

ALBIN: -- They resist change. The Army is no different than any other administrative entity. Our job, as HTT's, was to insert ourselves into brigade combat teams who were on the frontlines in Iraq. But the colonels who ran these brigade combat teams, BCT's, often wanted no part of us. "Who are these outside civilians who just descended on me? I never asked for them. Now I've got to house and feed and keep them safe. And they ask all kinds of stupid questions. And they want to sit in on staff meetings and they send me reports I never asked for."

*Q: Just to set the scene, when did you arrive in Iraq, more or less, and what was the situation --*

ALBIN: Ah good.

*Q: -- in, in, in Iraq by the time you got out there?*

ALBIN: All right, if you'll recall, the Iraq War started in March of '03 and went precipitously downward shortly after our arrival and the fall of Saddam, and the conquest of Baghdad. Paul Bremer was the viceroy, the American proconsul, and his group of people were appointed by the White House, State Department, and DoD.

*Q: I've interviewed him, by the way.*

ALBIN: Uh-huh. Oh, I'll look him up in your archive. He was not the first, by the way. There were others before him.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: But he inherited the job, as a Bush appointee, and in my opinion did a pretty good job under extremely difficult circumstances. Because in November of 2003, as I think I told you, I was there with the Library of Congress' small team to evaluate the National Library of Iraq. So we were in the palace and we saw how the Army and State and the cultural people and the knuckle-draggers interacted. It was a donkey circus in Saddam's palace, inside the Green Zone. But somehow it worked. I mean for the time that I was there with the Library of Congress, a very short time, it was impressively chaotic -- but organized chaos, as they say. Bremer, being in charge of it, is to be commended for that if nothing else. I mean, he and his staff I think did a good job of keeping everybody in line. Of course that's way below the level of high politics that he was operating at. If I haven't told you about that TDY (temporary duty), I'll save it for the Library of Congress archives.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: But still, as chief administrator, he had some responsibility for some bad decisions. Well -- by the time I got there in '08 the, the military situation had deteriorated through five, six, and seven and into '08 all over the country. I will not rehash any of this for our purposes here as we tried to pacify Iraq, if you'll pardon the expression. We never expected to have to pacify Iraq, for one thing. Now let me go back, just to mention, that I, from day one, from March 20<sup>th</sup>, '03, I opposed the invasion of Iraq. I remember going to lunch the day the news broke. It was shortly after the invasion started, or it may have been the day of, and I was talking to a group of friends at lunch. They asked me what I thought of the Iraq invasion.

I said, "I think it stinks. I think President Bush has created a tar baby that he'll never get free of. There's going to be hell to pay. I can't predict what kind of hell. But it's a big mistake." That was my view. And so after I retired in '04 things had developed in Iraq to the degree that things were getting really bad. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and

others were sniping at Rumsfeld and others about increasing the number of troops in Iraq. Shinseki was making noise about doubling the number of troops. I think we were up to -- by the time I deployed we were up to well over 100,000 troops, 150-160,000. And Shinseki was asking for more. Various politicians were asking for more and second guessing Rumsfeld and Bush. But anyway, those years of '05 to early '08 were disastrous—tragic for Iraqis and for us. By the time I got there in 2008 the COIN strategy that I mentioned earlier was counted a success. General Petraeus as division commander in Mosul had successfully employed COIN in his area of operation during his year up there. General McMaster, or Colonel McMaster, now General McMaster, (retired I think) in Tel Afar, in Northern Iraq not far from Mosul, also used COIN to pacify that town, which was kind of like Winchester, Virginia in the Civil War, one day blue the next day gray. You remember. During the Civil War Winchester changed hands several dozen times.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: Well, that was what Tel Afar was like, between the Shia, the Sunni, the Kurds, the Shia, the Sunni, the Kurds. It was a complete, deadly mess. Somehow McMaster made a go of it. By the time I got in country, Tel Afar, was not in the news anymore. So something worked between McMaster and Petraeus. The COIN tactic of getting soldiers out of the big bases, the FOBs, as they were called, the forward operating bases, and into smaller bases in suburbs, in the city, and the countryside seemed to be working. American patrols were intimately seen by the Iraqis with interactions daily. While not perfect, this approach was a hell of a lot better than what had preceded it. It didn't succeed immediately in those terrible battlefields of Fallujah and Ramadi, up and down the Euphrates, in Anbar Province and in mixed areas immediately south of Baghdad's city limits. Those continued to be *really* awful, as did the Sadr City quarter of Baghdad. Sadr City was the playground for elements that kept the country destabilized for three or four years, at least. When I got to Iraq in the spring of '08 with John Townsend and the small team, Kony, our research manager, and three research assistants, Iraqi-American research assistants, one Sudanese-American and two Iraqi American assistants. We were assigned to a mini-base on the fringes of Baghdad International Airport, the southern edge, just inside the, inside the wire. Our team was assigned to the 101st.

*Q: Airborne.*

ALBIN: Airborne, the Rakkasans. I have very uncomplimentary things to say about the Rakkasans. I have the greatest admiration for those guys, don't get me wrong, and for their combat history. They were our host brigade. As I mentioned, some colonels didn't have the least idea why we were there. Of all the colonels that I did business with over the course of my deployments and my time in Leavenworth, -- the, the 101<sup>st</sup> commander was the *least* hospitable or businesslike of any of 'em. Even Townsend, who talked the Army talk and walked the Army walk, couldn't get a rise out of him. When we passed the guy in the hall and he never ever greeted us...never even looked at us.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: Daily, multiple times every day. He never looked at us, never said good morning. What does the army teach officers? I don't know where they teach this. I don't know whether they teach it at the Academy or whether they teach it at OCS (Officer Candidate School) or in ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps) or wherever they teach it, but what do you notice about the Army? What is the first thing you notice about an Army officer? It's not so much true of enlisted men. It's true of sergeants, NCO's (non-commissioned officer), but let me tell you what I noticed. There is never an officer who does not say good morning or good afternoon to you, and look at you right in the eye when you're approaching them on the sidewalk or in the chow line or wherever you are and say good morning. There's not a one, except our commander for the 101<sup>st</sup>. He would walk *right* by us down a narrow hallway that was no broader than the two of us. John took the brunt of his cussedness when he went to his office to deliver our reports or get cleared for a mission. Then, one time about four months into our stay, one of our reports finally softened him up, so that Colonel X came into our little cubbyhole and came over to our desks. He stood between our desks, but he really addressed John. He said, "John, I've been treating you like shit, and I apologize for it. I don't know -- I've seen some of your stuff and it's pretty OK and it's useful, and the staff is telling me that they use it. That was a surprise to me, because the staff of course pays no attention to anyone but me."

*Q: Of course.*

ALBIN: Adopts the personality of the boss.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: (*laughs*) So the G2, the Intel captain, the S9, the civil affairs people, and everybody in between, just gave us the cold shoulder. But all of a sudden, I guess they were reading our stuff, because John made sure that it was distributed by email and by hand, in paper copies to all the sections.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: -- either in paper form or in e-form. In the evenings when the colonel wasn't around we would sit in on staff meetings where they were planning for some operation, or discussing some local personalities, or some civil affairs activity. They invited John and me, or sometimes just me, to sit in. So when the discussion around the table was about things cultural, I would say my piece. I'll give you an example. Not an example from that particular BCT -- we were with the 101<sup>st</sup> for four months. Then we moved down to Nasiriyah where we were with the Third Infantry Division, fourth brigade of the Third Infantry Division, for my final several months. This was because of a bureaucratic, screw-up that the HTS administrators visited on us that really made me change my opinion of the Army. In any case, we were shunted down south. I'll get to the details of that later. But one day we were in one of these planning sessions for an operation. It was

planning for a round of daily patrols. We're sitting there and, and I said, "Do you know that Ashura is starting day after tomorrow?" This was after I had put the calendar of religious events on the intranet for everybody to see. "Ashura is starting the day after tomorrow."

"What's Ashura?" they asked.

I had to explain all about what Ashura was. It's the 10-day ritual that the Shia have where they commemorate the death of Imam Hussein a millennium and a half ago. And, and people leave their towns, Nasiriyah in this case, and walk 250 kilometers to Karbala where Hussein was martyred. They mourn the martyred Imam, do penance by weeping, lacerating themselves with swords and chains and perform many other rituals associated with the tragedy. You've seen these events in your travels. Not festivals, but commemorations. In any case, I said, "Day after tomorrow this event is going to start and it's going to last for 10 days. And it may be a good idea to not send the twice or thrice daily patrols through the middle of downtown Nasiriyah. It might be a good idea to work with the IP and the IA, the Iraqi Police and the Iraqi Army, to manage downtown for the next 10 days in a different way than you've been customarily doing it," which is driving the Humvees and the MRAPs right down the main street. "You may want to take the circle route, avoiding the center of town and let the IA take care of center city." So they considered the idea and changed their plans accordingly. They did the same thing for commemoration of the Fortieth Day, which is also a big pilgrimage time. This is just one example of the kind of thing that would come up in staff meetings once resistance to our team had dissolved.

*Q: Well, I take it that what you're trying to do is act as the oil between the military and the Iraqi customs and people and all that?*

ALBIN: Yes, precisely. I'll give you some other examples as the conversation goes on. I had a thought. One of the things that probably brought Colonel X to softening up a little bit towards us was that at the beginning he didn't know what to make of us civilians. Now, John was a former Ranger. Our research manager was a former army interrogator warrant officer. But the rest of us were civilians. The colonel showed no respect towards John and none towards Kony, our research manager. And he certainly didn't show any respect towards me. What turned him around, I think, was John's persistence in hammering away at the colonel desk-side. He would just go in uninvited, plunk himself in the chair at the colonel's desk and not leave until the colonel talked to him. He convinced the colonel that our job was not to sit in the Baghdad International Airport and go out with the patrols two or three times a week, but rather to go out to the COBs, the Contingency Operating Bases, in and around the AO (area of operations) where we were stationed. John and I developed a plan to circulate around the AO two or three times, getting to know the area and its tribal and civic leaders like mayors, or teachers, key shopkeepers, even women we might talk to in the market. By the way, let me explain where that area was. That was a fascinating area and I wish we had been able to stay there during my whole deployment because we were really beginning to get known around the area. As I had mentioned, we were in a corner of the fenced area of the

Baghdad International Airport, which covered many square miles. We were in a little corner, that's where the Rakkasans were based. So we would go out to the rural areas in the southern part of Baghdad Province. Baghdad Province has two characteristics, unbeknownst to most people. It has the huge urban capital city, home to four or five million people, at least. And then it has a vast hinterland that is part of the province administratively, but has nothing demographically or socially or economically in common with the metropolitan area. These are your typical dirt farmers of Iraq, as poor anybody in Iraq, especially after their lives were ravaged by AQI (Al-Qaeda in Iraq). If they were lucky, there was sufficient water in the rivers, in the Tigris on the east side or the Euphrates on the west side for irrigation. If it rains a little bit they might have some tomatoes and some lettuce to sell in the markets in Baghdad. Or maybe they have a couple of sheep and chickens. But failing that they've got nothing, absolutely nothing. It's scratch, survival farming. Near wells, the richer sheikhs invested in fish farming. So we were in Baghdad Province, but not in Baghdad City. The Rakkasans' area of operation was this rural area. We would go out occasionally -- in our first few weeks, let's say. John would beg the commander to let us go out with patrols for a few hours so I could interview people, take pictures, and talk to whoever would talk to me. I was begging interviews. Sometimes I was lucky and got to interview sheikhs, sometimes I was not lucky with nothing but an interview with a farmer and a picture of his hut and family. I took a lot of pictures and tried to get what I could from them. We didn't go out far enough on those patrols for me need a helicopter, so I was doing my surveys from the porthole of the Humvee or the MRAP. You can imagine what kind of meaningful research I was able to do, or ethnographic research, under those conditions. Practically none. Eventually John prevailed on the colonel to send us out for days at a time. The Rakkasans had these contingency bases -- COBs -- in maybe five or six areas in small farm villages or towns around that part of the province. By the time that we were able to get out on our first trip, John and I had our strategy. Our expectation was for our team to be there a year. As it turned out, I wasn't deployed for not quite a year. John and Kony were there for a little more than a year. It had to do with administrative stuff, contract expiration dates and so forth. We designed a plan. John shot the plan to the colonel, who eventually after some resistance okayed it. Our first trip was southwest to a small village, to an infantry company in a small village along the Euphrates. We stayed at that village probably three or four days. For the first time I had opportunity to interview school principals, sheikhs, the local government leader, and several farmers, and attend a funeral of someone who's been assassinated. The only people I was not able to contact and interview were women, because we had no women on our team. We had a *marvelously* productive time with this company. The company commander was pleased with our visit and so was the brigade commander.

Here's where I found that the army does its best work, at least in my view. This is true of my deployment the first time around and my deployment in Anbar Province the second time around. At the company level, these company commanders, these captains, really get it. These guys were good. They understood what we were there to do, they understood and were sympathetic to the Iraqis, they understood what COIN was all about. They understood the concept and executed it. They did a magnificent job -- those guys and their staffs, their Intel people and their civil affairs people. They may not have had many

resources. Their communications were crappy, and their CERP (Commander's Emergency Response Program) money was in short supply. But boy, were they resourceful and did the best with what they had. And they appreciated having us around.

*Q: Would you say this was a generational gap in a way?*

ALBIN: Oh, unbelievable.

*Q: I mean between the colonels and the captains?*

ALBIN: Oh my gosh, yes. Those guys were 30 odd years old. Their commanders were ten to fifteen years older. I mean you *(laughs)* -- it's a great observation, and it's true. Now, the colonel down in Nasiriyah where I was and the colonel in Ramadi where I was a year and a half later, they were good guys. They didn't have the personality quirk that the first guy had. But they had an absolute generational mindset removed from the younger officers.

*Q: What -- I mean looking at it, what was the mindset of the -- I can sort of understand the older officers. I mean they were ready to fight the tank battle in the folded gap. Yeah, I mean they were obviously wedded to heavy equipment and --*

ALBIN: Oh, you should have seen the Rakkasans' parking lot. They had dozens of Bradleys (Bradley Fighting Vehicles) that were as useless as Abrams tanks on the Beltway. I never saw any of them move out of the parking lot, not even for exercises.

*Q: OK, you've got -- OK, one can understand what they were training for, but you know, this was pretty flexible. But how about the younger ones? Was it on the job training or what was it -- or was there something in the generational thing that maybe back in the States --*

ALBIN: A captain who wanted a career in the army. Let me think for a minute. I think every captain. Only one or two were West Pointers. They were ROTC products or OCS. They were young men with families, physically tough, they took pride in their hardships, like monks in a desert monastery. -- They took pride in the deprivations, in doing penance. That was kind of the spirit.

*Q: Quite a --*

ALBIN: These were not special operations guys. These were infantry officers. Because they were captains they had never been to a CGSC, the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth. Because that's the progression, you know. So all they had was their infantry or artillery training and perhaps an earlier deployment to Iraq or Afghanistan.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: They had no higher training than that, except maybe a couple of them had Ranger tabs. They were not your crème de la crème, go forth and lead majors, lieutenant colonels, *yet*. Did any of them want to do soldiering for a life's career? We would sit around and have coffee with them. Some would say yes and some would say no. Most of them were too busy to sit around for coffee. I was lucky to get some time with them to interview them. -- Oh, here's another thing about the captains. We never arrived with our COB -- either by helo or by road -- unannounced. John had to arrange our trips with transport and with the S3, the operations guy, after getting the colonel's OK. So the S3 would communicate that we were coming out. It was like what you guys call country clearance. You know, you send a cable forward and say, "Albin and Townsend want to come out and do something-or-other and they'll be there for about two weeks." Something along those lines.

And then somebody at your embassy says, "OK, we'll make a note of it," or "We'll meet them at the airport. And don't forget the cholera shot," -- something like that.

So the S3 would make sure that everything was ship-shape. Sometimes it was and sometimes it wasn't. But in no case was the host captain, unaware of our arrival. He had somebody there to meet us at the flight line or pad to take us to our tent and then to the company commander. The first thing we would do when we dismounted the helo or vehicle was to go to his desk. Some of these guys would talk to me for two or three hours straight because they finally had someone who was interested in their AO. They would set the scene for me. They identified the sheikhs and their sub-tribes, who the honest or corrupt local officials were. They sketched the kinetic history of the AO. He would see that we met all these useful people. He'd stand at a map or a photo gallery or we'd sit at his terminal and he'd go through this information at length. Not one of them was a dud. It was very impressive at the captain level. They told me who on his staff was informed and who was not. As people started to trust me they passed me on to the Intel squirrels. Now this was *verboden* in HTS. We were not to have anything to do with intelligence, but at the company level the Intel sergeants were as eager for what I knew as I was for their insights. In order to get, you've got to give. So I spent many evenings with these guys. But I never intruded into their sessions with informants or tried to delve into operational details. In the two deployments I met only one informant -- it was in Ramadi when my research partner and I happened to be present during a conversation between an Iraqi narcotics police officer and a street informer.

*Q: Sure.*

ALBIN: -- The secret squirrel. There were two guys who needed local information most. The Intel sergeant and the civil affairs officer and staff, whose business was with the community civilians, funding schools or clinics, clearing irrigation canals of blockage, repairing roads and bridges. They wanted somebody along to take a look at the sheikh or the local leaders. To share impressions. To monitor the conversations.

*Q: OK. Well, you go to there, you get this briefing, you learn who's corrupt, who isn't, what needs doing and all. What was your role?*



ALBIN: My role was to listen to the Army officers and to the locals, and write up what I was hearing from the former so that the latter could meld it into their thinking. Army deployments were from twelve to eighteen months. Many of the soldiers were in their second tours, at least, so they had a pretty good idea of Iraq, but weak understanding of Iraqis. Let me think of examples. There was an incident. What the hell was it? At Qa'im Air Force Base in 2010. This is a good example. I was in my second deployment at Qa'im Air Force Base, also called Al-Asad or Ayn al-Asad outside the small town of al-Baghdadi in central Anbar Province, along the river. I was there for two weeks to talk to the local leaders and report to the battalion staff. I would go out from the base with patrols. By this time I knew what I was doing and could make my own travel and staging arrangements. I was there for about two weeks just to have a vacation from my main assignment in Ramadi. I was able to spend nights out at COB's. Things were winding down in that second deployment, so al-Baghdadi, al-Haditha, Rawa, and other towns and villages were pretty quiet. There was the occasional IED (improvised explosive device), mortar round, or assassination as in Kubaysah whose mayor was assassinated just after I got there, but there was not fierce fighting like there had been earlier in the war. I spent more time than I wanted inside the base. That's why in the end I decided to return to Ramadi where I could be more productive. Anyway, the Intel officer -- the S2 -- was a major. He was a really bright guy, a very interesting and interested fellow. I was in his office chatting one day and I said something about the new gas field that was opening up in the west of the province. It was becoming a security focus of the IA (Iraqi Army), and of the provincial government as we withdrew from the country. The gas field is called Akkas and it lay in the AO of the battalion at al-Asad. As the battalion made plans with the IA to start training for the US withdrawal at the end of 2011, protection of Akkas was an important objective, so I was surprised when the S2 guy asked "What gas field?"

He couldn't even find Akkas on the big map in his office. I was astonished, because back in Ramadi at provincial government headquarters nobody talked about anything but Akkas, the revenue, the security, the constitutional issue of revenue sharing. Billions of dollars were projected to come to Anbar Province from the field. The issue was so big that it was being discussed in the Baghdad press and debated in parliament. I read about it every day online. One of the things that I was able to do from the moment I set foot in Iraq the first time until the day I left the last time was to read the press. Nobody knew how to read the press. No American officer, no American enlisted man knew how to read Arabic. The people who knew how to read it, the local advisors, but they didn't follow the media either -- unless they were actually prompted by a direct question from the Americans. They didn't know what was useable news and what was not. So one of the things I was able to bring to any unit that I was assigned to was media awareness, the news scan that you and I take for granted every morning. Between the time I brushed my teeth and the time I sat down for the morning staff meeting I had a general sense of what was going on in Iraq and my AO. Nobody else did. That was a very big Army weakness, a very big failing.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: I was involved in only one incident where guns were drawn. It was a screw-up on the part of our staff sergeant commanding a patrol that started late one afternoon.

*Q: You mean --*

ALBIN: It was at a contingency operating base, meaning it's not a big FOB, like a forward operating base, of the brigade. The sergeant didn't plan the patrol, of course. The operations officer did that. In any case, his patrol was to start at 4:00 in the afternoon and was supposed to get back before dark. So I got in the car with him and we were tootling down paved road (hardball, they called it) a one-lane macadam road. Out in the fields, way out -- not quite to the horizon, but way out -- was one of these pick-ups. And (*makes shooting sounds*) from the back of the pick-up, you know AK fire. I was in the patrol leader's vehicle. He hears gunfire and gets excited --this is his bread butter, what he joined up for. He forgets all about me in the back seat. In fact, I'm not carrying anything. In those days, we were obliged to wear a uniform along with all the other battle rattle. So I was completely equipped, except for a gun. Didn't have a weapon. The patrol sergeant he tells his guys over the radio to the three other cars, "Chase that MFer down the canals. We'll bring him to ground." We wheel off the main road onto the farm tracks along the irrigation canals, bouncing over fields. It's getting dark. The pick-up disappears into the dust and the dusk and we lose sight of it, but we can still hear the shooting. We're zigzagging between fields along canals that are mostly dry irrigation ditches. They're just mostly dry because of the years of drought and inoperable river pumps. He sends vehicle A in this direction and B in that direction and C in another direction. We're tooling all over the place. Finally we see a farmhouse. The patrol leader radios everyone to converge there. Well, they're all lost. They don't know how to get to the farmhouse. They've got these blue force trackers (fancy GPS) but don't know how to read the zigzags through the fields, but finally they somehow get together near the barnyard.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: -- They dismount in their soldier way. I don't know it exactly, they have a routine to follow. I don't do infantry so I don't know how that's done. But the sergeant turns around to me and he shorts, "Do you have a 9 mil? Are you carrying a 9 mil?"

I said, "No."

He said, "Well, do you know how to shoot?"

I said, "Not very well."

He said, "Do you know how to use a shotgun?"

I said, "Yes, I know how to use a shotgun. I've done duck hunting."

So he picks a shotgun off the floor and he says, "Go stand behind that haystack," or whatever the hell it was, in the dark I could tell. I stood there and watched them do their

infantry thing approaching the farmhouse. Turns out that it was a wedding. It was the celebratory wedding fire that were chasing. Happy and whole, I handed the shotgun back to the sergeant and got in the vehicle.

*Q: They had a --*

ALBIN: So that was my closest call with firefight. We go back in the Humvees and get lost again on the road back to the COB. We had to stop at a remote soda-and-chips shack to ask directions.

*Q: It just -- even today we have trouble with drones and other things, because in that part of the country if you have a wedding you gather together and you're firing weapons and all. Sometimes we have accidentally shelled wedding parties.*

ALBIN: It's a terrible thing. Obama mentioned that in his speech on July 23<sup>rd</sup> at NDU (National Defense University). Absolutely. Big problem. OK, I have lots of stories. I want you to guide me. I don't want this to be a war-story thing.

*Q: Well --*

ALBIN: I told you my only war story, that silly thing right there.

*Q: I do want to, you know, next time around, any thoughts that you might have, I mean including, you know, what your opinion was about how the patrols worked and all that. I keep thinking about the -- my time in, in, in Vietnam where we used, you know, to talk about -- well, the object is to win their hearts and minds. And the best way to do it is to grab them by the balls, and the hearts and minds will follow.*

ALBIN: (laughs)

*Q: You know, and it was much -- I mean obviously that wasn't really the case, but the -- but your impression of some of these kicking down the doors and moving --*

ALBIN: OK.

*Q: And, and --*

ALBIN: OK, from what I've read of CORDS, there were a lot of similarities. COIN was almost a carbon copy of CORDS. Including the resistance on the part of academics and the left wing, the anti-war people ganged up on COIN, as they had with CORDS. It was a great scandal at the time in Vietnam.

*Q: Yeah. Yeah, well, you know, the intellectual community neither rallied to the cause -- in fact, they opposed the cause, and yet, they weren't really offering any solution.*

ALBIN: No, they weren't. That's right. And CORDS was a way of recruiting people into -- or offering people the chance to make a contribution to the solution. It was a terrible time.

*Q: OK.*

ALBIN: Now, one of the alternatives to a national commitment on the part of the United States in Vietnam and GWOT, the Global War on Terror, is the recognition, which most Army people don't like to think about, that a strong American military generates resistance here in the United States, especially during wartime.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: Americans will put up with only so much of it. And when an administration, such as the Johnson or Nixon administrations or the Clinton and Obama administrations, decide that they don't want to get involved in this messy stuff, then America is diminished by that, it seems to me. Yes, we lose 50,000 men in Vietnam, or 4,000 men in Iraq, and 2,500 men as in Afghanistan. But by not accepting the risk, we are inviting bigger losses in the future. Look at the damage our withdrawal from Vietnam caused over the next 25 years as far as the Cold War was concerned. OK, that's enough preaching for today.

*Q: OK, so we'll stop here. Next time we'll pick this up we'll stick with both your first and second deployment, but some of the tactics, your opinion of how they were going, the role of women --*

ALBIN: I'll also --

*Q: -- in, in various forms of our influence there.*

ALBIN: Absolutely.

*Q: And your impression of the mixing of our troops and the local populous.*

ALBIN: Mm-hmm.

*Q: Kids. And you, from your background, of being far more aware of the religious side of things. How much, how much was --*

ALBIN: I could go on and --

*Q: -- the Sunni-Shia business, I mean just both Iraqi society and Sunni-Shia business. And maybe even the positive side of Ba'ath, which was, you know, at least a society --*

ALBIN: I have a lot of friends who see no positive side to the Ba'ath. I personally agree with them. But I could argue a positive side if you like.

*Q: Well, I just -- but I think -- but your impression in the field --*

ALBIN: Ah, OK. Ah!

*Q: I'm not trying to get off on the big thing, I want, I want your --*

ALBIN: OK.

*Q: I mean you've been around the block and so -- and also maybe a bit about the Iraqis being different than Egyptians.*

ALBIN: Ahh, boy are they ever.

*Q: Yeah, you know, I was brought up as a -- having been in Dhahran and all on July 14<sup>th</sup> and all that, that -- you might not worry too much about the Egyptians street, but you sure as hell didn't want to be Iraq when the mobs started coming.*

ALBIN: (laughs)

*Q: But anyway, I mean and that sort of thing.*

ALBIN: Right.

*Q: Your impressions as -- OK --*

ALBIN: That would be fun, I look forward to that.

*Q: Today is the 19<sup>th</sup> of July, 2013, interview with Mike Albin. And I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy and this is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies. And Mike, we're -- we might be duplicating a bit. But we played the last part of the last tape, it's been a while. You were in Iraq from when to when?*

ALBIN: I was there several times. I was there from 1966 to 1969. I was there again as a Fulbright scholar in 1990 before the Gulf War broke out. I was there again in 2003 with the Library of Congress -- just shortly after the invasion of 2003. I was there with the Library of Congress, delegation of three people to look at the national library and national archives and the condition of those two institutions. I was there again in '08 and '09 with the Army, with the Human Terrain System, then again in 2010-2011 with HTS.

*Q: Do you recall where were we more or less?*

ALBIN: I think we were talking about my HTS experience, my Human Terrain System experience.

*Q: That's right, you had this Human Terrain thing.*

ALBIN: That's right, yes. Yes.

*Q: There are two questions I asked. One was about the, the Ba'ath Party at the time. Not looking back on it. But considering the slaughter that's going on as we speak tonight -- we have Sunnis and Shias blowing up things -- how did we feel when we were there? This would have been when-to-when?*

ALBIN: Well, Saddam took over in 1968 when I was teaching at Baghdad College. Saddam was part of a group that staged a coup at that time against Abd al-Karim Qasim, who was the President of the Republic. After they disposed of him they took power. He was -- that is Saddam -- was vice president at the time, but very much in charge; the power behind the president because his Ba'ath Party was supremely influential at the time and remained in control for until 2003. Influential is an understatement. The party under Saddam positioned itself over time so that it became the chief ideological engine for the state's fascistic regime. And so Saddam from the very early days was the boss and remained the boss until he was removed by American forces. So what to say about Saddam? There was probably no dictator in the whole 20<sup>th</sup> century that was any worse than Saddam. He was as bad as you could get. His regime was no multiparty sham. There was not even a pretense of a multiparty system. His party ruled for all those years, from the '60s to the 2000's. He brooked no criticism. There were spies in every government agency, in every commercial company, even in households. As a very good Iraqi friend who's representative of all Iraqis that I know, says, "There is not one single individual alive in Iraq today that was not victimized by the Saddam regime from the '60s to the very end."

*Q: So there's no -- you didn't sense at the time any nostalgia for the Ba'aths because they brought peace.*

ALBIN: No, they brought peace? Did they buy peace? Well, that is something we could discuss. I don't know what kind of peace they bought, an eight-year war with Iran, a genocide in the South, war crimes in the North. I don't use the words lightly. A racially motivated animus against the Kurds, religious persecution against the Shia and their leaders and peasants in the 1990's after Gulf I. So I don't know what peace you're talking about.

*Q: So in other words -- this was not -- well, if only we, we never had it so good. Because -*

ALBIN: No. And another thing he visited on the Iraqis and the Iraqis hold the Americans responsible for. Let's not neglect to mention the sanctions of the 1990's, which brought Iraq -- Iraqis -- to their knees. It don't mean bring Saddam to his knees, which was the intention of the sanctions after we withdrew in a cowardly but pragmatic way following Gulf I. We should have stayed and finished the job, and I don't know why George H. W. Bush didn't do it that way. We would never have faced the tragedy that Gulf II visited on the Iraqis if Gulf I had been seen to the conclusion, to its justifiable conclusion. But the

guy, the President of the United States, didn't have guts enough to push it. And that was the big mistake. Now, let's go back to the sanctions. Bush and the UN -- old man Bush and the UN decided that sanctions would be a good way of pressuring the Iraqis to bring the regime down. Well, that was a Chimera and it never worked and all it did was bring the Iraqis down while Saddam prospered -- Saddam and his family and his cronies prospered. One of the reasons that the Iraqis find our alliance with them so distasteful to this very day is because of the sanctions. The sanctions did not work. The Iraqis suffered; not the regime.

*Q: OK, last question I had left at the end of the tape, is could you compare and contrast the Egyptians and Iraqis as you see them?*

ALBIN: *(laughs)* Well, I can't compare many Arabs with many other Arabs because I haven't lived all over the Arab world. But I have lived in Iraq and Egypt long enough to be able to maybe answer from my point of view. The Egyptians -- the Egypt that we have seen in the last two years, the millions in the streets, the regime change, the --

*Q: We're now talking in 19 -- I mean 2012, 13.*

ALBIN: Exactly. We're talking from January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2011 to be exact until today, 2013. Those Egyptians in their millions with their sometimes hysterical opposition to the powers that be, sometimes bordering on the *really* violent, not just the mob violence, the evanescent mob violence, but the really violent, the fundamental violence such as would lead to civil war. Those Egyptians are brand new to me; I never saw this side of Egypt before in all of my experience. To this day every time I pick up a newspaper or I look at the news on the web or listen to an Egyptian broadcast or telecast, I marvel that the Egyptians have changed so much from what I understood them to be. The Egyptians were long-suffering, they were patient, they were hardworking, they were lighthearted, they were dismissive of their political leaders using humor and societal workarounds. All of that ended in January of '11 when they took to the streets and brought the Mubarak regime down. They had had enough of him. Eventually they went to the polls and they elected a majority Muslim party headed by Mohamed Morsi. Afterward they elected -- they ratified, I should say -- a new constitution that was substantially Islamic and not secular and not laissez-faire and not liberal in any sense. In addition to electing a parliament of Islamic activists, and of those activists perhaps as many as 20% were not activists, but fanatics, Islamic fanatics represented by the newer party. And so with regard to the texture of the parliament, they elected an extremely extremist majority. They ratified an extremist constitution. This surprises the hell out of me. I still don't know what to make of it. Nor do the Egyptian people. Then, more or less recently, within the last month or so, they've come to the streets again saying after a year of the Muslim Brotherhood's reign, President Morsi and Islamism are too much to bear. They've said enough is enough of this extremism, and we want Morsi gone and we want a revision of the constitution. Again they took to the streets in their in millions. Again this was uncharacteristic of any Egyptian behavior that I'm acquainted with. So how to compare the Iraqis with the Egyptians? Last time we talked you said, "beware the Iraqi street," because you have memories going back to July 1958. You remember the king and his

family being butchered. Nuri al-Said, the prime minister and kingmaker, being dragged out -- being captured in women's clothing (really just an *abaya*) as he tried to escape. He was ripped apart in the street. You have recollections perhaps of 1969, I believe it was, when I was eyewitness to the hanging in Tahrir Square in Baghdad, in Liberation Square of Baghdad, of eight, nine, or 10 Zionist spies from the gibbet in central Baghdad. I rode my bicycle down to watch the event from the suburb in which I was teaching and living. You're thinking of that kind of Iraqi street. And to answer your question, over the last two years the Egyptian street is beginning to resemble more and more the Iraqi street. I am puzzled by that. It's, as I just said, it's uncharacteristic in my observation of Egyptians, but that's what happens when people are driven by hysteria.

Regarding current violence in Iraq, I have to characterize it as unsurprising. What have we got going there? We have an alliance of two forces. One weak and one strong. The weak, the weak part of the anti-government alliance is the remnant of the Ba'ath Party, the diehard Ba'athists, the diehard Arab nationalists. Let's define what Ba'athism means, at least superficially without going into a whole lot of political science here. Ba'athis are Arab nationalists first and foremost. Iraqi nationalism goes along with that. We could also call them socialists, but they're really not socialists. They are people who seek a strong Iraq in order to justify an army, for two reasons. One, to, to hold power in Iraq for themselves because they want an army that defends and supports their regime. The other reason for an army is to assist in eradicating Israel. Of course, going back to what I said before, it's quite clear that the vast majority of Iraqis, Sunni-Shia, Christian, Yazidis, Mandaean, any stripe, atheist, secular, whatever stripe you want is against the Ba'athis. But the small Ba'athist remnant remains. And who are they linked with? They are linked with the stronger element of the alliance, the alliance of violence and terror. And that is al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda directs what we're seeing in the news reports today with dozens of people killed every day: Terrorism all over the country, in the south, in the Shia areas, and in and around the army camps and police stations. The objective of both al-Qaeda and the Ba'athi element, the nationalist element, is to weaken the government so that they can eventually come to power. Maliki, Prime Minister Maliki's government is weak, it's - - let's put it this way -- it's hapless, it's corrupt, and it's Shia dominated. But it has the loyalty of the armed forces and police in my observation. Now, remember, I haven't been in Iraq for two and a half years, so I haven't talked to people across a table or at tea for two and a half years. But I daresay I follow the situation in Iraq as closely as anybody can in the media, and I am convinced that with all of its weaknesses Maliki's regime's strength derives from the armed forces, who are pretty much unpenetrated by either al-Qaeda, the Islamic element, or by the Ba'athi element.

*Q: Do you see the -- what is it, the Sadr Movement -- which is a Shia movement, isn't it?*

ALBIN: Mm-hmm, yes.

*Q: Do you see them -- I mean at one point they seemed to be the major threat. Do you see -- threat is not really the right term, but the, the -- a major force is going to take over, or is -- do you feel that it can run its course, or what?*



ALBIN: Let's go back to what I just mentioned about the government elements. The Shia parties, the Sadrists being one of them, the Hakimists being another one, were both really bad forces. The Sadrs and the Hakimists were really bad forces during our occupation of Iraq, beginning from let's say in round numbers, 2004 to 2008, more or less. They were unalterably hostile to American occupation and to one another, and uncontrollably hostile to the Sunni populations of Anbar Province, Saladin Province, Mosul Province or Nineveh Province, and so forth. They created death and destruction. Both of those parties, the Hakimists and Sadrists have now been bought off, suborned in some way. They've been convinced that it is in their best interest to hang with Maliki in his Da'wah Party in order to confront the various threats to national security, national unity, and Shia hegemony. So today the various threats are the Islamist- Nationalist, al-Qaeda and their Ba'athi allies, plus the Kurdish threat that is political, not military. Notice that I've not mentioned an Iranian threat. There is an Iranian interest, to be sure. But not a threat. Neither the Sadrists nor the Hakimists, regardless of the personal links of their leaders to Iran, have any truck with Iranian interests in the long run. They are Iraqi first. Ditto Maliki.

Now, let's go back to the violence that Iraq has suffered in the last several months. You'll notice when you look at the papers and the reports that this violence is not stimulated by the Shia. The Shia have been absolutely quiet in all this. At the moment the Sadrists are on the sidelines, for all intents and purposes disarmed, and the Hakimists are too. Neither is a force at the moment. They're supporting Maliki and his army -- which is not a 100% Shia army, by the way. I don't mean to imply that Maliki runs a Shia army. The army is a mixed bag of ethnicities and political leanings. I met and talked to and have been in conferences with several of the high ranking Iraqi division commanders. Believe me, they are as hard drinking and as hard cussing as they ever were under the Ba'athis when they reigned under Abd al-Karim Qasim. But their fundamental allegiance is to a unified Iraq. And right now, unlike Egypt, they are recognizing the democratically elected prime minister as their boss. And they, unlike the Egyptians, have loyalty to the democratic process. The Egyptians have disappointed me *fundamentally* in throwing Morsi out.

*Q: I mean looking at this as somebody who's been around, do you feel that Morsi let you might say the democratic process down too?*

ALBIN: No. No! Morsi was elected. Morsi was a dumb politician and a fool...didn't know what he was doing, and his counselors didn't know what they were doing either. But he was elected in a clean election!

*Q: You know, I mean we put a halo around someone who's elected. I mean a person is elected and is expected to, particularly in a democratic process, to behave in a certain way and to represent everyone. And apparently he didn't.*

ALBIN: Well, that's true of every incumbent politician.

*Q: But you know, there's a certain leveling down.*

ALBIN: Mm-mm, no, I don't take that argument. That argument is made every day -- since July 3<sup>rd</sup> that argument has been made every day by The New York Times and everybody who follows The New York Times. It's been made by the blogosphere, it's been made by the Twittisphere, by the Egyptians. I read those Egyptian arguments every single day. And I'm appalled.

*Q: Mm-hmm.*

ALBIN: Do you think for one minute that this street business is going to restore democracy to Egypt? I don't.

*Q: No.*

ALBIN: OK. All right. 'Nuff said.

*Q: Well, whatever it is, he is unable to --*

ALBIN: He was a dumbass! I totally agree.

*Q: Well anyway, my -- where -- come back to overall picture, but you, your time in that area was not over, was it?*

ALBIN: I was there with the Army on two occasions. Let me talk about the Human Terrain System, which I don't think we got into much the other day. The Human Terrain System was set up by the Army in about 2007 in order to fill a gap that had developed in its approach to the occupation of Iraq. That was the lack of understanding on the part of officers at all levels, from corps all the way down to company level. The Army sensed it lacked understanding of the Iraqi community. I think I mentioned the last time how impressed I was by the cultural grip that the captains, the company commanders, displayed in dealing with their small areas of operation, their battle space. They did a terrific job of meeting people, understanding people, talking to people. Tireless guys they were. The higher you got -- perforce -- the battalion commanders and the brigade commanders, not to mention at division or theater level, the commanders and staffs were isolated from those day-to-day contacts. They didn't have a grasp of what happening outside the wire in Iraq, and what the tribal leaders were thinking or the religious leaders, or local politicians at the provincial level or at the sub-provincial level. They didn't know a whole lot about what Ramadan was or about what a Shia was versus a Sunni, any those cultural details. The Army made attempts at their various colleges to bring them up to speed on those topics, but in the press of business, a guy running a brigade of three to five thousand strong doesn't have a lot of time to study Islamic jurisprudence or tribal law and custom. They, the Army, the Pentagon, felt that they ought to have somebody at their side who could answer questions and who could pick out upcoming problems -- where were succeeding and failing in our relations with the local community. So they instituted this Human Terrain System. The thought was to bring in academics and support staff to counsel -- let's just stick to the brigade level -- to counsel the colonels on who these people were who lived outside the wire. I think the last time I described to you the

various categories of personnel that were included in the Human Terrain System. The idea was spectacular. And if it had been properly carried out, Stu, it would have been a great boon to our forces in both Afghanistan and Iraq. Unfortunately, the recruitment of personnel was pretty poor. And even at the social scientist level you had to ask yourself what good it did to have a PhD in anthropology who did a dissertation on Honduras or the Philippines come to Iraq and try to puzzle out the scene there? And that's what happened. That was usual.

*Q: Well, was that because of the lack of experts on Middle East society?*

ALBIN: Yeah, I would say that was one of the difficulties. It's not to say that we -- we meaning HTS -- didn't have our share of Middle East graduate experts. Many of the graduate experts were ABD's, all-but-dissertation type students from reputable graduate schools in the U.S. who were taking a break from dissertation writing or their thesis defense to join the Army as social scientists or subject matter experts. There were some good people among them. There were some amazingly good people in that crowd of anthropologists, sociologists, economists, and so forth, who knew the Middle East or were quick studies. They knew how to study the Middle East. They knew the right questions to ask. But the good ones were in a minority, in my observation. There were a lot of people who weren't acquainted with the Middle East. That was problem number one. Problem number two was that the leadership of HTS at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and then later on in Tidewater, Virginia, Fort Eustis or wherever they wound up, I don't know where they are these days or even if they still exist, was weak. Extremely weak. They were also distrustful of the academics and SMEs (subject matter experts) which they themselves hired for research and which were the reason for the project in the first place. The HTS brass, most of whom were active duty officers, didn't understand what HTS was all about. And so HTS came in for a lot of criticism in the press and in the university. A *lot* of social scientists, especially left-wingers, left-wing anthropologists in the American Association of Anthropologists, the Triple-A, took aim at HTS and constantly vilified the program, just like they did with CORDS.

*Q: Just to get an idea of, you know, academic disputes can get as nasty as Sunni-Shia. But why would the left-wing go after this? I mean is this they were opposed to military action, or was this a visceral attack, sort of an academic teapot tempest, or what?*

ALBIN: Well, the opposition probably didn't number more than about six anthropologists sprinkled around the country, one of them here at George Mason University. Their arguments were the typical anti-Vietnam War arguments, the anti-CORDS arguments. This HTS system is just another CORDS, it's just another effort by American imperialists to occupy another country and its grab its wealth. Which is probably the biggest canard in the whole 10-year episode in Iraq. That the US tortured and humiliated innocent people at Abu Ghraib -- and on and on. The press picked up this noise because the media opposed the war and hated Bush. So this criticism from hostile academics was magnified by the media.

*Q: This is a scandal which --*

ALBIN: Prison scandal.

*Q: -- you know, a few sadistic or really basically stupid --*

ALBIN: *(laughs)*

*Q: -- military -- I mean really it wasn't overly sadistic. It was*

ALBIN: Yeah, it was juvenile and stupid.

*Q: Well, anyway, it was --*

ALBIN: Yeah. The Abu Ghraib Prison Disaster -- or scandal -- was a disaster in terms of PR (public relations). Now, of course it was splashed all over by the anti-war press beginning with The New York Times and The New Yorker and all the rest of those unhelpful, unpatriotic organs. But it especially caught in the craw of academics who used it and any other scandal that came along such as the Marines in Ramadi, Fallujah, and Haditha. The Marines were portrayed as trigger happy and cruel, no better than Blackwater. The commentators kept hammering at the war, at the genealogy of the war extending back to the CORDS experience where social scientists were suborned to do the bidding of the American imperialists in Vietnam. And so forth. They laid down a constant barrage of newspaper articles, op-ed pieces, scholarly newsletter pieces, blogs, vilifying HTS. Let's go back to Iraq, because that's why you're interviewing me and my experience overseas. How did this news of scandals affect our on the ground operations on a day-to-day basis in my assignments in Mahmudiya, in Nasiriyah, and in Ramadi? *Not. At. All.* The Iraqis couldn't have cared less about it. This was American huffing and puffing. It had nothing to do with the Iraqis. The Iraqis were by and large oblivious to or ignorant of what happened in American politics. So that when it came time for us to schedule our departure in December 2011, opinion was unanimous where I was in Anbar Province -- Sunni stronghold, nationalist stronghold, with lots of sympathizers for the nationalist cause, in parallel with lots of sympathizers for the Islamic cause -- there was unanimous expression of displeasure and disappointment that the Americans were leaving. "Why don't you stay? We need you. We need you to prevent more instability. We need you to help us with economic development. We need you in any number of ways. *Why are you leaving us?*" One of my jobs in Ramadi was to accompany my colonel or his command team on visits to provincial leaders, have dinner with them or meet them in formal and informal settings. One of my jobs and my partner's was to explain to American officers the Iraqi concern about the American withdrawal. The American officers' response was always and ever just exactly what their commanders told them to say... that the US had scheduled its withdrawal at the end of the year. Period. It was our job to make sure the Iraqis understood this as best they could. There was always a lot of disappointment expressed on both sides.

*Q: How would a dinner like this -- what would be sort of the operation of a dinner? I mean what would you -- how would this work?*

ALBIN: Oh, this is interesting. This is a very good down-to-earth question. You can take all of my political views and scrap them. You can erase them. Now you're talking about day-to-day business. In Ramadi, in 2010, our small detachment of about 120 people were there in order to advise and train Iraqi police. So our little U.S. Army compound, was headed by a colonel (an O6, in the vernacular) because of its high level training responsibility. The detachment was in the middle of the Iraqi provincial government's compound. What does that mean? It means that the provincial governor had his office there, as did the provincial council, the legislature. The provincial police department was also headquartered there. The provincial civilian administration was there too. Several of the very important administrators and provincial council members had their *residences* there. They may have come from another part of Anbar Province, but for reasons of their own personal security, having been targeted at one point or another by al-Qaeda, they were granted a residence on site, in the government compound. We had a configuration of buildings that included the, the governor's office and his bureaucracy, the directors of finance, employment, electric power, the director of this, the director of that, the provincial council chambers, the police department and several residences. What was a typical week like for my partner and me? We were stationed there away from brigade headquarters, which was about seven or eight miles down the road. In order to go there, which we did from time-to-time, maybe every two weeks we'd go call on our boss who was there, our HTS boss. Or we'd call on the brigade HQ or the brigade colonel, or we'd attend brigade meetings. I personally went to the brigade headquarters as infrequently possible. My partner had the same view. We were having fun in our little compound. Why were we having fun? The Army staff at our facility included the colonel -- two bird colonels, the commander and his assistant, a couple of lieutenant colonels, and a lot of majors. They all had their police training portfolios. They would be out every day with police units, either to a big training site or on operations as observers. They would assist with police communications and technology, finance, internal security, and drug enforcement, among other duties. Each had his specialty and counterparts. In addition, they were supplemented by American police contractors, usually retired cops at a senior level of service in their home city -- Cincinnati or St. Louis or some place or other. They worked for a contractor called MPRI (Military Professional Resource Inc.). I don't remember what it stands for. It was and may still be a big defense contractor or security contractor. Anyway, there were about a dozen of those guys. My research partner and I, plus the MPRI police trainers, were the only civilians in the group. All the rest were Army.

Why were we having fun? We came to be trusted by unit commander. Because our detachment was small we ate together. We did everything together. We had Christmas parties together and birthdays. We knew each other very well. For example, I would be writing a report after an engagement with, say, the provincial governor. I could go to the colonel's room and say, "Colonel, do you have anything to add to my draft? Do you want me to leave something out? Is this something I ought to tell you off the record?" We would discuss things like this. We were just open all manner of discussion. That was one reason my partner and I enjoyed the assignment so much.

Number two, the brigade commander was several miles away. He had the greatest trust in and respect for not so much me as for my research partner, who had been there longer than I and had terrific street creds (credentials) with the Iraqis. She was bi-lingual in English and Arabic. She had terrific impact on our colonel's thinking -- on the brigade commander's thinking. So we felt that we were being listened to. We felt that we weren't just writing reports and sending them into the ether. A third reason was that we had absolute *carte blanche* on Iraqi side. I mentioned that we lived in a compound filled with Iraqis. Every single night we would be out with our detachment colonel. He made a point of going to have tea with the police commander, the equivalent of a four-star police commander, for the province every night. So after we ate dinner Colonel Jennings would ask, "You want to come along?"

If we were busy with something we'd say, "Now now, sir, we've got to finish this," or "No, I ain't in the mood," We could joke and be frank. We could go or not go. So more often than not we did not go. But occasionally, maybe twice a week, we would go over to his tea with the police commander. The police commander was, in the first instance, a guy who was a hard-drinkin', hard-swearin' Iraqi officer from the old Saddam regime who was a no nonsense guy. As far as we were concerned, as far as Muna -- my research partner was named Muna -- as far as she and I were concerned, as honest and frank as any senior Iraqi official could ever be expected to be. There were rumors and accusations about him, of course, but he never got caught with his hand in the till. He was eventually removed. He was a Sunni but was trusted by Prime Minister Maliki and had open access to Maliki any time he wanted to talk, on the phone. Whenever he wanted to drive to Baghdad he could walk right into Maliki's office. Anbar was a crucial province, having been the center of the insurgency for so long. Anyway, he was replaced under unusual and unfortunate circumstances by a local guy, also a high-ranking police officer, very experienced, also from the old regime, who remains in place today three years later. Neither Jennings nor I nor Muna thought that he was as strong a personality as the guy that he replaced. But was really none of our business. This was an Iraqi decision made at the highest levels of the Interior Ministry and with the blessing of Maliki. Although Anbar has seen more than its share of violence over the last several months, and I watch events there every day, I assure you, I'm a little disappointed at his performance. I don't know the behind the scenes because I'm not having *tea* with him anymore. I don't know what constraints he's under. I don't know who the army commander in the province. There used to be pretty good relations between the IA (Iraqi Army) division in Anbar and the provincial police.

So getting back to our routine: Daily, without fail, we would go to the Provincial Council for its session. Muna and I attended along with the PRT, the (Provincial Reconstruction Team) specialist in Iraqi Government Affairs who was Josh Rosenblum. At least one of the three of us would be there every single day. We would take notes, and I would sometimes fall asleep as the members mumbled on about inconsequential matters like placement of parking signs.

A provincial council session went like this. The chairman would call it to order. Then there would be discussion of an agenda. Or he might raise topics at random, because

there was never an advance agenda. It was like they were meeting for the sake of meeting. Maybe one or two members would have topics for discussion. These were often grievance sessions, complaint sessions about roads, problems of electricity, or just general bitching. They, they would discuss problems big and small. All the while we took notes. The three of us felt we had every meeting totally, completely covered on every topic of interest to the population of the province. Sometimes the discussion was substantive, such as the Akkas gas field contract, or tourist development at Habbaniyah Lake outside Fallujah, or police and security matters along the Euphrates. When there was a really hot topic like sharing the customs revenues at the border crossings with Jordan, we'd ask for a private meeting with the Council chairman or a particular member. These were usually held without appointment. We simply walked into the member's office to discuss the issue over tea or a lunch buffet.

So, let us say the Council meeting was scheduled for 10:00, it might be actually be called to order at 11:00. They would talk and confabulate and argue and so forth until perhaps 1:30 or 2:00 in the afternoon, then break for lunch. We would have lunch with them. Lunch was in a huge spread in the hallway of the Council building. Long tables were set up and an immense lunch was brought in. We'd find a spot at the table and eat while standing, reaching and grabbing with our hands and chatting with whomever we happened to be standing next to. If we didn't like the dish or platter in front of us, we'd move over to the next table and, and eat the goat and talk to whoever was down there. A lot of it was just plain chitchat. Muna kept busy fending off proposals of marriage by the male Council members.

*Q: What was her background?*

ALBIN: She's a Palestinian-American. In any case, we would reconvene after lunch and we'd sit there until I could stand it no longer and either fell asleep in the session or just leave. Because, you know, I mean legislatures are legislatures.

*Q: (laughs)*

ALBIN: If there was nothing of substance I'd go away. Then we might have meetings in various government offices. One of my main concerns was finances. So I would go with Josh, of the PRT to the director general of finance for the province. We'd talk about the budget, about the allocations that the province was receiving from Baghdad. We talked about supplemental incomes to provincial coffers as its share of customs duties on the Jordanian border, and the allocation of those funds. We almost never went alone. I was either with Mona or Josh. There was usually a U.S. Army officer with us. Somebody came with us because there was a civil affairs component to our little attachment. And the civil affairs guy would often come along. They were very engaged with the locals. They were wonderful colleagues. We had lots of interesting discussions. But they were basically clueless about the politics of the province. So I used these meetings as a chance to educate them in civics, in Iraqi civics. Oftentimes in the evenings we would go to homes; at least once a week, perhaps more often -- I mean we were always getting invitations to the homes of the Iraqi officials who lived on the compound. One deputy

governor, a very courageous man, lived on the compound and a couple of high-ranking bureaucrats lived there too. They invited us for dinner or tea, usually to chat with the colonel. They lived in houses next door to us so we didn't have to go outside our compound. It was all inside the wire, inside the barbed wire and cement walls. So we would go to Deputy Governor Hekmat's house for dinner, or to the home of the Council's vice-chairman Saadun for dinner. Those were the two people we visited most frequently. Dinner often was a large Iraqi buffet. Or sometimes we went over just for dessert. From time to time Muna was asked to babysit because their kids would come over from wherever they lived in the city so they would overnight with dad. It was social and business at the same time. And, as I say, it was all fun. There was a lot of exhausting activity. After returning from these evening meetings, our work would begin. Everything for Muna and me was grist for our mill. We had to write our reports to get them to the commander and staff before the end of the night. During the course of our conversations we would inject a topic. Let's take drugs for an example. The biggest sheikh of the region was a guy named Abu Risha. Word was, the scuttlebutt all over the place, was that Abu Risha was big into the trade. Muna and I, of course, as well as our officers were curious about this. They wanted to know if the rumors were true and if true just how prevalent drugs were in Anbar.

*Q: Abu Risha --*

ALBIN: Sheikh Abu Risha. When that was a hot topic we never missed an opportunity to inject it into our conversation somehow, with whomever we were talking to. Similarly, the budget of the province was a very critical issue locally and in Baghdad. It was even a constitutional issue. We never ceased to talk about the budget with officials at all levels. As we got closer to leaving the discussions became more and more urgent on the part of the Iraqis' side about what we're going to do "after you guys leave. What are we going to do after you Americans leave? What shape are you going to leave Anbar in? We want you to stay. Our police force needs you. Our finance people need the PRT, our ag people need the services of the PRT ag specialist, and so forth. How are we going to get our sons and daughters on Fulbrights or, International Visitors trips? How am *I* going to get to the United States so I can shop for my wife and keep her happy?" These were their questions.

*Q: Let's talk a little of operations. How was the rule of law there? You know, always one of the problems with police forces.*

ALBIN: I think I remember accurately that one of the MPRI contractors specialized in this. He was a really committed guy. Unfortunately I never accompanied him on any of his visits to his counterparts in the police department. But he was probably as busy as anybody in that group of civilian trainers. He was constantly doing reports and sitting with his police colonel counterpart and giving courses. The provincial police department had a training site off base, in Fallujah. I didn't interact with the rule of law people very much. There was a rule of law lawyer as part of the PRT too. Here's a possible issue for further discussion, but not by me because I don't have enough information. There were one or two lawyers on the PRT, based at brigade headquarters at the big FOB in Ramadi. As far as I could tell, those two guys did absolutely nothing. I might be wrong. I saw



nothing that they wrote, no reports, no nothing. Our rule of law guy in our little detachment who was working directly with the police was a very active fellow, as I say. As far as I know, he never interacted with the rule of law people at the PRT. It was as though we were living different parts of the country, yet we were a few miles from one another. As far as I could tell there was no cooperation.

*Q: Did you have any feel for police activity?*

ALBIN: Well, we never got into jails. In fact, let me tell a Muna story. Just before I got to Ramadi, Muna had a project going to interview the half-dozen women prisoners at the provincial prison. She had access through the good offices of all these people I've been describing, the American side and the Iraqi police side. She visited the women prisoners who lived in jail with their children. I don't remember what their crimes were. She wrote a report or two on conditions and on her interviews. But she was called off the project by our HTS superiors on the grounds that we HTSers were to have nothing to do with the real nuts and bolts security. Prisons being among those nuts and bolts. So she was ordered to stop the project.

*Q: Was this a bureaucratic problem or was this a security problem?*

ALBIN: No, this was a policy problem. HTS, wanted to keep its nose clean, so could we could never be accused of being CIA or MI, military intelligence, or in any way tainted by intelligence or targeting. We were never to have anything to do with police work or intelligence work. It may have been a good social science project in principle, but prisons were off limits.

Now, with regard to MI, military intelligence of any kind, we were in daily contact with the police commandant and the Police public affairs office. One of our best contacts was the young Iraqi lieutenant in charge of public affairs. Because the police had a parallel system of communications with our own MI we read both reporting...our reports as well as theirs. We knew where the explosions took place. We knew where they were suspected next. We knew where the drones (surveillance drones) were flying and saw the live feeds. We knew who was being surveilled. We knew where every sheikh in the province was. Just what you see the NSA doing to us, we were doing to the Iraqis. So we saw everything all the time. And the Iraqi Police were doing the same thing. Is that military intelligence? You *bet it is*. Did we write reports about it? No, but we did sit at Colonel Jennings's desk or somebody else's desk and chat about what was and was not important in our judgment.

*Q: Of course. Let me stop for just one second. OK. You're going to give me an example.*

ALBIN: Yeah, let me make a note here just so I don't forget something. MI. I mean intelligence comes at you from any direction all the time. You, you can't predict what's going to be important --

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: One of the fundamental tools for my kind of research is the press! The daily, weekly, monthly newspapers and magazines, what people are reading, the television, the blogosphere and every kind of media.

*Q: It was a literate public, wasn't it?*

ALBIN: Oh, very literate public. Let's not get into Iraqi literacy. That is a whole different tragedy I can talk about for hours because I'm a nut on the subject. That was one of my big concerns with the PRT's. But in any case, the Army units I was with never heard of such a thing as an Iraqi newspaper. They lived in Iraq with *no knowledge* of the Iraqi media, and with *no knowledge* that there even are daily newspapers. So I asked my colonel, "Can I get you to pay for newspapers?" He agrees, of course, but doubts I can find any. The next problem is finding them and getting them delivered to the compound, since we're not allowed to go out. So I ask the soldier in S1 (admin), "How do I get newspapers?"

"Oh, godammit, I don't know. Do they even have newspapers in Iraq?" Then began the merry chase.

So I said, "Yeah, they have newspapers. They get them from Baghdad. They may have local newspapers too. How do I find out?" So I asked around the Iraqi contacts we had, as I explained to you we had all kinds of high-level contacts. So I -- we tried one expedient after another... our patrols were going to stop and buy newspapers at the cigarette kiosk, or the soda and chips shop, or at the bus station, or whatever. Nothing worked. No newspapers.

So I finally found a local guy who had access to the compound daily from the city and agreed to deliver papers for a little cash. Who was this miracle worker? The garbage man.

So I asked him about collecting and delivering magazines and newspapers. He promised to bring a selection a couple of times a week. "Which ones do you want?"

I said, "*All of them.*"

"OK. So which ones are they? Sometimes this one comes in sometimes others."

"I don't care. Whatever it available buy it."

He said, "OK, fine. How do you pay?"

I said, "I'll work it out with administration." So, the admin guy starts the paperwork. First problem is there's no box on the form for newspapers and magazines. So he's got to create something that doesn't exist. Soldiers don't like to deviate from their forms. That's a big no-no. We try to doctor the form and send it up to brigade. Brigade doesn't know what to do with it, they send it up to division. And meanwhile, I'm without any

newspaper. So I start paying out of pocket. That's how it went for the rest of the year. Some days the garbage guy brought a big batch, some days none at all. He also brought lots of duplicates. Never mind, I paid for them anyway to keep the pump primed.

One day in the paper and I see an archaeological article from the antiquities service saying that Haditha Lake on the Euphrates is losing water because of the universal drought in Syria and Iraq. In addition, the Syrians and Turks are cutting off the water supply by building dams, making the Euphrates in Anbar even lower. In fact, when I was out on my patrol up-river at Al Assad Air Base, driving daily along the Euphrates, sure enough, I noticed that it was real low. I don't know what the normal Euphrates looks like. But it wasn't the mighty Euphrates you imagine. Only one of the five spillways was open on the dam. According to the article, the water level at the dam and the lake behind it had dropped, exposing caves along the cliffs which archeologists said were once the cells of Byzantine hermits or monks.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: Archaeologists are excited about it. Well, I'm excited about it for another reason. What do you suppose caves are used for halfway to the Syrian and the Jordanian borders? What do you suppose they might be inviting?

*Q: \_\_\_\_\_.*

ALBIN: We're talking al-Qaeda infiltrators.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: We're talking bad guys who need a place to camp out or use as staging areas. I need to bring this to brigade attention, but I don't do anything without checking with Colonel Jennings first. I said, "I'd like to bring this up the next time I go to the FOB."

And he said, "Yeah, this is an interesting thing. Why don't you go talk to these people about running the drones low to the ground instead of, instead of up high at regular altitude, 3,000 feet. Run 'em low just to the ground level and start filming the lake bed and the adjoining cliffs, to see if you can see over time whether there's any activity day or night activity and write about what you see."

The S2 (Intel) at the brigade kind of pooh-poohed it because he didn't know me. We didn't have much contact with each other. I brought it to his attention. Sure enough, as time went on, they did indeed run the drones along the lake. I don't remember what happened because this was late in my tenure and I don't recall seeing any reports. But that gives you an idea of the kind of operationally relevant info you can get from the newspapers.

*Q: I mean to draw lines saying this is military intelligence and this is not, I mean, you know, you know, if you're particularly running in operations of a civilian world.*

ALBIN: Yeah. .

*Q: Mike, what were you gathering about the strength and popularity grab of al-Qaeda in your area?*

ALBIN: OK. I'll talk only about my two deployments, al-Qaeda in the Sunni provinces, where I was. I was in Anbar for the better part of a year. I was in Mahmudiyah for half a year. Anbar is 100% Sunni. Mahmudiyah -- the Mahmudiyah district was predominantly Sunni. I was also for several months in Nasiriyah, in the south, which is entirely Shia. I would say as far as Qaeda is concerned, it was universally hated. There are two kinds of blame, justified and unjustified. We Americans came in for a lot of unjustifiable blame. Al-Qaeda came in for a lot of justifiable blame. I tell you, Stu, in the Mahmudiyah AO my partners and I would go into houses, old farmhouses that had been turned into al-Qaeda torture chambers where Shia, where the local Shia villagers had been tortured to death. Racks hanging from the ceiling, chains with hooks hanging from the ceiling where these people were tortured. Shia fled their farms and whole villages were abandoned. Therefore I didn't meet any Shia villagers. The Sunni farmers hated al-Qaeda and often told me that they wanted their Shia neighbors back. Al-Qaeda had no sympathy in the Mahmudiyah area at all. They had been cowed into cooperating with them. Their daughters were kidnapped and married to al-Qaeda commanders. These grievances against al-Qaeda are well known in the literature.

*Q: Was al-Qaeda basically a foreign -- I mean was this something coming out of Saudi Arabia? Or what was it?*

ALBIN: Thank you for asking this, because this occupied a lot of our attention on both deployments. You may call it to some degree MI. I would call it political science and part of my job to be aware of the local situation as a social scientist was to figure out to what degree there was foreign participation in the local violence and political influence, Saudi or Iranian. Were they infiltrating from Syria or over the Saudi border to the south? If so, were they Iraqi Ba'athis or foreign jihadis? Where was their money coming from? Where were their hangouts? How were they getting into the Mahmudiyah jurisdiction which was isolated from any international border? How did they *get there* in the first place? Who allowed them in? What were -- what were their transit points? What were their finances? Who was feeding and expediting them along the way? At company level in the small bases I got whatever information I could. But at brigade I got nothing. The S2 was a female captain. She and I never talked. So I got nothing from her, never any reaction to my reports from the small COBs.

The distillate, in answer to your question, is first of all, al-Qaeda was universally hated by Iraqis of all stripes. Secondly, al-Qaeda was heavily infiltrated by foreign fighter influences and leadership influences, as we saw in the case of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, when he was trapped and killed. Third, the borders were porous so that Iraqi terrorists found refuge in Syria and maybe to some extent Jordan, although I was never able to pin

that down for sure. I never was able to pin down anything going back and forth to Saudi Arabia or Iran. Those border areas were out of range for me.

*Q: Was this support of the Syria government, or was it just that it was --*

ALBIN: Open desert. It was open territory along Anbar's border with Syria. The Syrians had to be complicit in expediting transit for insurgents. But in what way, I don't know. I'll get to that in a minute. So moral support, logistic support, and financial support, safe-haven support for sure. Nowadays, it's become pretty clear that Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and a mixture of Gulf and Peninsula countries are involved in financing and supporting the Qaeda operations in Syria. My guess is, although I can't prove it because I'm not privy to any of this information, that the same group of countries is funding the unrest in Iraq as well. As I pointed out a few minutes ago, the Shia are not involved in this terrorist violence. It's *only* the Sunni renegades. The die-hard Ba'athis and the Islamists. And that is the same group of people who were operating in my day from '08 until the middle 2011 in Iraq as I was observing it. It was an alliance, a shifting alliance. I was not privy to the inside dope on cooperation between the Iraqi nationalists, call 'em Ba'athis or Naqshabandis or whatever on one hand and al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) on the other. Don't forget, the Naqshbandi Army, or the new Ba'athists or the old nationalists, got religion in order to maintain their standing with AQI.

The nationalists, the Ba'athis who were well-known under Saddam as being secularists and turning a deaf ear to religion and Islamic appeals except when it served their purposes, seemed to have gotten religion because of their alliance with al-Qaeda. There may be a religious cast to their propaganda. Their vocabulary is often a religious vocabulary. But they're the same old Ba'athi cutthroats that they've always been, in my view. So to answer your question about al-Qaeda in those days, I think they haven't changed very much. It's a combination of forces. It's a combination of nationalities. It's an uncontrolled border situation with Syria. And it's even an even more uncontrolled funding situation from the Gulf and the Peninsula.

*Q: What about -- I mean you were somewhat removed, but what about Iran? Was --*

ALBIN: Ah yes, I was just about to get to Iran. Good, I'm glad you asked. Iran in those days was the Beastie Boy of all of this. They were controlling and manipulating Maliki. They were controlling and manipulating Muqtada al-Sadr and the Jaysh al-Mahdi, the so-called JAM. They were controlling the Badr Corps of the Hakim family.

*Q: You're saying this is the word rather than the actuality.*

ALBIN: Well, this was universally believed. Just like it's universally believed that deposing Morsi is a good thing. Deposing the only other, the *only other* democratically elected leader in the Arab World is a good thing. People will believe what they want to believe. People will find out that it's a mistake. Similarly, people have found out with regard to Iran controlling Iraq that that was not true then and it's not true now, in 2013.

*Q: Well, it's Arabs and Persians.*

ALBIN: Yes.

*Q: And they -- that's never been a particularly --*

ALBIN: *(laughs)*

*Q: -- stable relationship.*

ALBIN: *(laughs)*. That truth didn't prevent everybody from believing that Iran controlled Iraq! It didn't prevent the sheikhs in Anbar Province from laying *every damn bombing*, every stubbed toe and runny nose on the Iranians. Believe me. And the American Army just gobbled it up.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: And the American media just *gobbled it up*. Well, it was very clear from the beginning, from my first deployment in 2008 right to the very end, that that was boloney. Yes, were they, the Iranians, messing around? Were they arming their Iraqi allies? There was a kind of weapon that was a favorite of the Shia bad guys, of JAM and -- especially JAM and maybe Badr Corps earlier than that. It was called the -- damn it -- it was --

*Q: RPG (rocket propelled grenade)?*

ALBIN: Pardon?

*Q: RPG?*

ALBIN: No, it was that explosive device that exploded through armor -- EFPs, explosively formed penetrators.

*Q: Shaped charge.*

ALBIN: Yeah, well whatever, it'll come to me. In any case, I have no doubt that those things were coming in on the southern border of Iraq, the Iraq-Iran border. But my research partner, John Townsend, and I did patrols along the Iranian border in the marshes down south. We took helicopter rides, because the colonel down there with the Third Brigade of First Cavalry was a very simpatico commander, unlike the first guy we had with the Rakkasans. He okayed us to fly up and down the Iranian border over the Marshes, back and forth. John and I were really excited about this because we thought if there was infiltration across the Iranian border, this was where it was going to happen.

We figured out, to our satisfaction -- and I have pictures, I have hundreds of pictures from my camera from the helo going back and forth along the border that there were no trails to Iran. John and I saw *nothing*. I talked to my colleagues, HTS colleagues who

were stationed in the Basra area farther south. They reported that there were crossing lanes south of Basra along the Shatt al-Arab. This area was unknown to me. I don't know the topography of the place where the Shatt opens out into deltas and small channels. Not exactly lakes like the marshes, but something akin to very complex water systems where the Iranians had every opportunity and every geophysical possibility to smuggle this stuff in. Men and material. There's no doubt that my HTS colleagues in Basra were right. But as far as the marshes were concerned, I saw nothing. The Iranians had an impact, had a kinetic impact on instability of Iraq from '05 to maybe early '08. But after that three things happened. The U.S. Surge, Maliki's own acumen in running his army as commander-in-chief, and the Sunni Awakening in Anbar. Those three elements helped stifle and eliminate the civil war and much Iranian influence. By the middle of '08, give or take, the civil war was over, or the threat of civil war diminished because of those three factors.

*Q: Did the -- was it the movement of Sadr and all was considered quite a threat at one time.*

ALBIN: Yes.

*Q: But this sort of dissipated into what?*

ALBIN: I wish I knew -- we could get into this politics next time. However, to be honest with you, I don't know what kind of pressures were brought to bear on Sadr to make him change his stance. But I'll tell you one thing. Maliki had the greatest influence on Sadr and his faction. In 2009, don't press me on dates, I didn't study up for this interview before I came over. I should have done so. I didn't know where we were going to drift. The Battle of Basra took place in -- damn. Oh yes. The Battle of Basra took place if I remember correctly in '08. Maliki *decimated* JAM, the Sadrist force. We flew air support, I've read, while the Brits in Basra did nothing, although they claim to have been critical in the fight.

*Q: Yeah, mm-hmm.*

ALBIN: As far as I've been able to tell from the literature the British did nothing and we did nothing on the ground, as far as I know. But we provided critical air support to Maliki's operation called Charge of the Knights. Not long afterwards, was the Battle of Sadr City, in which Maliki did exactly the same thing. He *decimated* the JAM. I can show you videos from our drones. It was not pretty. And the Iraqi Army led the charge. This time we were on the ground. I don't know which divisions were involved. I don't know whether the Marines were involved. We were heavily involved on the ground. We were heavily involved overhead. But the Iraqi army took on the JAM and whooped 'em in Basra and in Sadr City. And I think even dumb old Muqtada learned his lesson. Since that time, he has been a good boy, a pious student.

*Q: Yeah. You mentioned education and literacy.*

ALBIN: No, I got it down here so I don't forget. For Stu -- education and literacy and whole-of-government. You've heard of that.

*Q: Mm-hmm.*

ALBIN: OK, I'll remind you of that in an email.

*Q: OK, and let's figure out another time to meet.*

ALBIN: Fine.

*Q: -- 25<sup>th</sup> of July, 2013 with Mike Albin. And Mike, you know where we left off. Do you want to pick this up?*

ALBIN: Sure. I made some notes about where we were last time and what we decided to do this time. I had a list of things that we might get to today. I want to say a few more words about the HTS, the Human Terrain System, for whom I worked for two tours of duty and a teaching assignment at Fort Leavenworth. We also wanted to discuss education and literacy, whole of government, PRT's, my research partner, Mona al-Aghawani, then we'll have some digressions along the way. So I'll start with HTS. I talked at length about it the other day, but during the week it dawned on me that I was missing the point or maybe not making myself clear. HTS was an effort by the Army to recruit outsiders, like myself, who knew either the social sciences or the region or both, preferably both, so that our forces could better understand who was outside the wire, and what Iraq and Afghanistan were all about, culturally speaking.

*Q: When you say outside the wire, that's an expression, but what do you mean by that?*

ALBIN: An expression of art that means the people who are the natives of the country outside the cantonment, the military compound, outside the barriers, outside the fort. The "natives," the local population.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: So who these people were, who these Arabs were, who these Iraqis were, who Shiites were, what Sunnis were, what they were thinking, how they were acting, what their social customs and patterns of behavior were. It seems to be a straightforward mission. Well, it turns out that HTS was very schizophrenic, never quite figured out -- and if it still exists to this day it probably still hasn't figured out -- what business it's in. Let me explain. The way I was recruited and trained going into the program in 2007 was that our job as social scientists or Iraqi area specialists, our job was to inform, the commander about the people who were living outside the wire, the social conditions, the economic conditions, the relations between men and women, the relations between religious sects, the relations between the government appointed by Baghdad and the tribes who inhabited the area, if it was indeed a tribal area., or the urban areas, if we



happened to be assigned to places like Baghdad, Mosul, or Basra where tribes may not have meant so much. In any case, our job was to explain to the colonel, to the lieutenant-colonel, to the general, to the commanding officer and his staff what these people wanted and how we could best meet their requirements and get the hell out of Iraq ASAP (as soon as possible). The other view that HTS took of itself, I talking about the suits and the brass back at Fort Leavenworth and at the Training and Doctrine Command, was that our real mission was to do social science research as if we were writing a doctoral dissertation in one of the social sciences. Those two objectives are incompatible, absolutely incompatible. If you go to a colonel -- if you work for the colonel of a brigade or lieutenant-colonel in charge of a battalion, he isn't interested the methodologies of public opinion polling. He doesn't care about the scientific method, focus groups, gender theory, emic vs. etic, etc. He doesn't care about emetic research or quantitative versus qualitative approaches in sociology. He wants to know why these people are rioting. He wants to know why his troops are being blown up on the highway when on patrol. He wants to know about the economic conditions in the souk (marketplace). He wants to know what the Iranians are up to and if his guys are going to face their EFPs (explosively formed penetrators). He really doesn't care about the fine points of econ or anthropology or so forth. But the people back in Leavenworth, or the people sitting in control of the program in Baghdad's Green Zone were often under pressure from Leavenworth to do pure social science research as opposed to on-the-ground counseling, desk-side briefings of the colonel, to get out and talk to people to do what a good solid reporter might do if he knew anything about the region he was reporting on. If there were opportunities to do survey research, that was fine, to get kind of a feel for a place. Use any method at all to get a feel for what people were thinking. There were many categories of people in any given area of operation. There were the ordinary people, jobless, victims of terrorism, victims of sectarian strife, victims of the civil war. There were women at a low social economic level. There were people at that low socio- economic level who were actually terrorists themselves. We talked last week about working the MI patch. We were drawn into that kind of thing because that's what the commanders and their staffs wanted help to understand. Then there were other classes of people who were bureaucrats. There were low-level bureaucrats with whom we talked, schoolteachers, for example, or low ranking imams at village mosques. We talked to engineers working for the directorate general of electricity, for example, and who moonlighted as contractors working with CERP (Commanders Emergency Relief Program) money, that the commander used to finance road paving or bridge building or to open a clinic or school. Then there were the higher-level bureaucrats. There were the, the directors general themselves. There were the provincial council members. All these people at various levels we as social scientists had to have rapport with on a day-to-day basis. We were not doing ethnographic studies beyond that. We were not doing public opinion polling beyond very basic kind of surveying. Our leadership was not satisfied with this. Our colonels were satisfied, but our HTS leadership was not satisfied. I want to make that clear.

*Q: Yeah, it's very interesting. I mean you get these sometimes -- the intelligence business gets into this where you have people back in Washington who are really getting stuff for their, the equivalent to a government PhD research. They're getting reports to go nowhere. But it's great for their academic appetite. And --*

ALBIN: That was a huge, big temptation with HTS leadership, as a matter of fact.

*Q: But how did -- can you combat this? Or was there any efforts, I mean inspectors come in and say look, they're full of crap. And was this being done?*

ALBIN: Yes, this was done all the time. You asked a very pointed question: what could be done about this? We handled it in a similar fashion in both deployments. It boils down to this: we ignored them, simply ignored the HTS bosses. The people in Leavenworth didn't have the resources or the guts to come out to the field to scold us. Maybe they didn't have travel money. We saw very few of them while I was in the field. They may have come to Baghdad to talk to the suits. Maybe there were "wrist slaps" or "guidance" -- I'm making quotes here. But, but we would ignore them. You can't do public opinion research with no resources to get out into the field to organize coherent, long term research projects. This work takes millions of dollars and a large staff of social science experts, analysts, field personnel. I did one public opinion poll that I sold our uncooperative colonel on. I was describing the uncooperative colonel with the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne last week. Townsend and I convinced him that it would be a good idea for us to get out to conduct surveys. So I, through John, convinced Colonel So and So to allow us to go out on patrols to do my survey, quick and dirty survey of, of population, of income, employment, level of education, family size, religious sect, and so forth. I did a survey of about 350 people. And I tabulated the results on Excel, which I presented to the commander. I can't remember what his reaction was other than that his body language that said, "So what?" So I said to myself, "screw this." It was the last time I tried to do anything quantitative. I said to myself, "I'll just stick to what he really wants, talk to people and report back and send two or three-page reports on whatever it was that he was interested in that week. And that eventually seemed to work. The other colonel (1<sup>st</sup> Cav), down south in Nasiriyah, was a much more open fellow than the first guy. In fact, we used to go out and smoke together in the smoking area where I did most of my briefings to him. But I never went back to trying surveys. In any case the Army has specialized people for this kind of quantitative work. It was much more productive to cover everything in the smoking area. Through the two tours there was constant tension between us in the field and the head office in the Green Zone. I'm not speaking only for myself. I'm speaking for many HTS social scientists in Iraq, with the exception of a few people who were assigned to Corps in the Green Zone. I didn't have a handle on what they were doing.

*Q: This is much -- they're one set back -- they're somewhat isolate and they're not rubbing noses with real people.*

ALBIN: That was why they opted to be in the Green Zone, because like the Duke of Plaza-Toro they found it less exciting, if you remember song.

*Q: Gondoliers of Gilbert and Sullivan.*

ALBIN: I asked many a colonel if he'd ever heard of the Duke of Plaza-Toro, generals too when they would helo in from Baghdad. It was only much later in Ramadi that Muna and I got in tight with a couple of the generals. But the Duke of Plaza-Toro, believe it or not, was an unknown hero to every single one. Nobody knew who I was talking about. But it was one of the most relevant examples I could have brought up. I believe every social scientist in the field felt the same way. We just said, "screw 'em. The colonel is our boss, not you guys. If you're dissatisfied with us, send us home." Some few people were fired, but not for that reason, but for goofing off. The preferred leadership technique of the Human Terrain System was to have constant communication with the field, that is, between the leadership in the Green Zone and the field. So we had regular conference calls, sometimes video conferences, sometimes just audio conferences. We had email phone trees or whatever. I learned very early in my first deployment that these were fruitless. They were simply run as a kind of roll call so our bosses in Baghdad could check a box to satisfy Ft. Leavenworth, who in turn had to satisfy the Pentagon. So I simply ignored them. At the appointed hour, my computer or phone line would inexplicably stop working. So I rarely participated. When I did actually take part it was always petulantly. So that's the HTS scene as far as goals and methods of administration, research and administration are concerned.

*Q: Did you see the military responding when you said, you know, if you knock and sort of kick down a door -- or I'm exaggerating. But in other words were you able to -- with the group you were dealing with -- have an equivalent to a softer approach to the, to the populous, which -- I mean you had to have a job done, you had people with guns and explosives blowing you up. But at the same time, you had to win the hearts and minds!*

ALBIN: Yes, that was critical. And that's why you don't win hearts with public opinion surveys, or lectures to the colonels and staff about the difference between qualitative and quantitative research. By the same token, no officer at any level, no colonel or general, or staff officer ever said, "We're not taking enough scalps." *Nobody* ever said that. That talk was anathema. Everything was hearts and minds. That was the whole basis of COIN, counterinsurgency. COIN was the coin of the realm while I was there. And I used it as a textbook at Ft. Leavenworth when I taught Iraq area studies there. During my first deployment, COIN was *deeply* imbedded in every team, brigade or company except the first one, except the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne. That guy didn't know what COIN was, pretended he had never been briefed on it. Not that he was trigger-happy; he wasn't. What it meant was he didn't know and he didn't want to know the techniques involved or that COIN was codified in Field Manual 3-24. FM 3-24 was my Bible and should have been the Bible of every other social scientist in HTS program, and should have been on every desk at headquarters.

*Q: Well, what's the title of the manual?*

ALBIN: *Counterinsurgency*. Officially, *The US Army – Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*. The edition I used was published by the University of Chicago Press with an introduction by Sarah Sewall subtitled "A Radical Field Manual."

It was based on a similar manual produced for CORDS. It was an update -- I may have this wrong -- it was an update of a field manual from 1968.

*Q: No.*

ALBIN: I mean the whole thing was revised and TTP's, tactics, techniques, and procedures, were completely different. It was Petraeus's baby. He formulated it when he was commander at Fort Leavenworth. And it will remain a classic, although there is some debate among COIN people and other pol-mil specialists, political and military analysts and specialists, about its current applicability. Nowadays, 2013, nobody mentions COIN. As far as Afghanistan is concerned, no one in the press or the specialized press has mentioned it almost from the day Obama entered office. It's no longer in the open sources which I read. I don't mean "Open Source" in the sense the Intel community uses the term, because that's not open source at all. What I mean is the ordinary civilian media and the specialized military journals accessible to the public. Anyway, the public media and the specialized media covering Afghanistan -- they *never mention* the term COIN. By contrast, in my day COIN was the operative strategy. Now, I'm sure that the NATO commanders in Afghanistan, the ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) commanders and their staffs and their and their brigade personnel know very well what COIN is. But it's not something that the Pentagon has pushed for the last four or five years as far as I've been able to tell. COIN was an amalgam of the hearts and minds strategy informed by social science methods. It reflected a requirement on the part of the Army to sensitize people like the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne and the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne and 1st Cav and the 25<sup>th</sup> ID, Infantry Division, to alter the mindset of the knuckle-dragging soldier, the door-kicker. It was intended to teach soldiers that these people, Iraqis or Afghans, are the people that we are here to save from their dictators, whether they're Taliban or Ba'athis, to set the political and social conditions for reconstruction, and then to get the hell out. It was thought that the best way to do that was to use a kid glove approach whenever possible. How many times was I involved COIN type operations and hearts and minds type operations? Daily I would go out with whatever rank, whether it was a staff sergeant who was running a patrol of four Humvees, or MRAPS (mine resistant ambush protected), or with commanders to sit with sheikhs or provincial governors or police chiefs, as I described last week, or going out with PRT (provincial reconstruction teams) people -- a topic I'll get to in a minute. The object was to engage the locals at every level *daily*. I described the only case of a discharge of weapons, which was turned out to be a wedding celebration. Again, I was never involved in a firefight but some of our HTS social scientists were. Was I around and close to IED's (improvised explosive device) or VBIEDS, vehicle borne IED's, or other, other violence? Yes. Was I, was I close to riots or other potential violence? Yes, indeed. But I was never directly shot at. My convoy was never attacked.

*Q: Take me on a typical or maybe even atypical daily -- day with you.*

ALBIN: Well, a typical day I described last week. A typical day would have been sitting in boring meetings in the provincial council in Anbar Province. That's what we did much of the time. Because our reporting was valuable to the brigade and to our little unit

commander, Colonel Jennings, and to the brigade commander, Colonel Lartigue. They wanted us around all the time. They wanted our reports and studies and would forward them up to division in Baghdad. On the rare occasions when we had to go out and we missed dinner with Colonel Jennings at the chow hall, it would be like panic. He would like to have us nearby to bounce questions and ideas off of. So we didn't go out very much, Muna and I. In my first deployment I was out a lot. Here's a typical day, a typical week with the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne. John and I went out maybe a week at a time, maybe as long as seven to 10 days, maybe as short as three days. It took a lot of time for me to prepare for a trip. It took as much time as if I was going to give an important lecture at a university or in a classroom situation. I had to study up on the tribes and the current political and security conditions in the area. I talked to patrol commanders who came in from patrol in that particular area. I interviewed the translators. I would sit in with the MI team -- not in that particular case with the 101<sup>st</sup>, I never sat with the MI captain because she was extremely uncooperative. I also sat with the S9, the civil affairs major. We would have long talks. He would go to his files. I would call the PRT down in Mahmudiyah and talk to the ag guy, the governance guy, or other professionals. I talked to whoever would talk to me, the education and governance people, for instance. I'd sit in on debriefs of patrols coming back from the area. So there was a lot of preparation. John, meanwhile, was preparing the actual trip. He was arranging the transportation and the billeting. If it was going to be by helo he would have to put our trip on the brigade's schedule way in advance, because the brigade only had two helos. So he tried to squeeze us onto a mission that was already underway, or in some cases he would be able to snare one (two were required, because none ever went out alone) just for the two of us. That was rare, as when we flew over the Marches, flights especially for us. But when we were with the 101<sup>st</sup> we always shared the helo with other passengers. Or we would go by road in convoys. A typical convoy would start in the morning. We would have a convoy briefing by the convoy commander who was a sergeant at some level of sergeanthood and he would go over the items on his lists of dos and don'ts as far as safety and security were concerned, such as how to conduct casualty evacuation on the particular routes we were to travel. What happens if we hit something? John and I, civilians, were also in full battle rattle. John carried a pistol, but and I never did. I thought, "What the hell? I wouldn't know how to use it anyway." So I never carried one. But John carried a nine millimeter. We would pile in the truck and go jouncing to wherever we were going. The way the battle space in Mahmudiya, a subprovince, was set up, was that there were five or maybe more companies distributed from let's say ten miles outside our big brigade base to 25 miles, to -- we would make a semicircle from the Euphrates on the west to the Tigris on the east. Our initial plan was to do an initial visit to all of them, spending as much time as possible with each company. Weather was the main limiting condition. There were frequent dust storms which halted travel. Then there were security concerns. After each visit I wrote a report on my observations of social and economic conditions in each company's AO. Then I intended to make a second and third tour of the same areas, talking again to the sheikhs and other leaders. After all of which I would write a final, capstone report on the entire area. That was our plan. But HTS because of extremely bad administration, jerked us out of that Mahmudiyah and sent us 300 miles south after we completed our first circuit.

*Q: Was that fairly difficult of not giving you time to get to know your territory?*

ALBIN: That's right. It was typical of confused and ignorant administration.

*Q: I mean the whole idea is to know the territory.*

ALBIN: Tell me about it.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: Stu --

*Q: Even in "The Music Man."*

ALBIN: You got to know the territory.

*Q: The territory (laughs).*

ALBIN: You and I are the same generation so we recognize the song. Boy did we fight that decision. We made bureaucratic enemies big time. We fought the decision, but ultimately lost.

*Q: What was -- was this just bureaucratic crap, or as there anything behind this movement?*

ALBIN: There was nothing needful behind the move. There was nothing operationally required behind the move, as far as we could tell. You know, to be perfectly honest with you, I'd have to go back to my notes to refresh my memory about how they justified the order. But it was simply awful. We were with the 101<sup>st</sup> for about three and a half months, maybe going on four months -- we were just planning our second go-round, our second circuit. By this time all the colonel's animus had melted away. One day he walked into the office and apologized to us. We were totally surprised. He stood between our two desks and he apologized to us. He really addressed John because John is the guy he respected and understood more because John was the former army officer and had persisted in arguing our position. After that, things were better. So we were looking forward to the rest of our year with the Rakkasans. I can't answer your question without going back to my notes as to the reasons why.

To get back to your question about how a typical mission went, John and I would hop on the convoy and off we'd go, bouncing along, to our first company. A company, 120 soldiers more or less, was a self-contained fighting unit whose responsibilities were knowing the terrain, the geographic terrain and the cultural terrain of their area of operation, and working with the local police, the Iraqi Police and Iraqi Army units in order to maintain the tranquility of the area. It involved most of all working with the population in whatever fashion the captain thought productive. That was the theory of COIN. He exploited whatever resources he had to engage the locals to win hearts and

minds. If it had to do with schools, then that's where he put his efforts. If it had to do with public health facilities, that's where he put his effort. If it had to do with roads that had been bombed or bridges or culverts that had been damaged that's what his company worked on. If it had to do with kinetic action, he would work with the police or army unit that happened to be close. In some cases when we visited these companies, the IA, the Iraqi Army, or the IP, the Iraqi Police, were actually billeted right in our compound. So he was in daily, hourly living contact with his Iraqi counterparts, planning missions. So we arrived there, either by air or by road. We were always very warmly greeted by the company commander, who prepared a briefing for us. I think I mentioned this before. He would just open his files of everything he could think of, his mental file of everything you could think of regarding the sheikhs, the civil and military situation. Was the Iraqi commanding officer a trustworthy guy? Was he on the take? Was he a member of a local tribe or an outsider? All that was thoroughly covered before I ever met the leaders. All of the research that I did back at the FOB, combined with the company commander's briefing set me up for success, as the Army likes to say. We would go over maps and aerial photographs. I was really well up on the area as I started out.

Now, how to talk to the locals? That depended on how long we intended to stay. I'll take an example of one COB that I was able to visit twice because it was only about ten kilometers from the brigade's base. Let's say a visit was for four days. John and I talked with the captain, and his civil-military affairs guy, usually another captain, maybe a lieutenant. He would design a tour for us of his AO. So we talked to the school principals, teachers, to as many sheikhs as we could, maybe with a mayor or the head of the local jurisdiction, and to IA and IP commanders. In the case of this particular AO, it was a combination of all of these. The population was mostly Sunni, but there was significant Shia presence. One of the major distinguished personalities of the region was a Shia sheikh. We spent many hours with him and other tribal leaders, thanks to the good offices of the captain, who had good relations all of them. Similarly, in that same AO, there was a very influential Sunni sheikh, the most important tribal leader of the area. He received us on many occasions and fed us when we arrived.

When we arrived at his place the first time it was in the middle of a funeral gathering for a relative who had just been killed. I'd have to go to my notes for details. Muslims are buried the day they die, or as soon as possible thereafter. After the burial there was a days' long reception at the sheikh's sumptuous residence for condolences. On arrival in the AO, we went to the company compound first. We met the captain. The captain says, "Can't spend any time with you right now. Got to go to this funeral. Why don't you come along?" John and I said sure, we'll be glad to. So we unloaded our duffels and got in a Humvee with the company commander and went to the sheikh's compound. We sat around and drank tea and smoked cigarettes for an hour or so, shook everybody's hand and offered condolences. The captain had been to these things before, so he knew the drill and the personalities involved.

These guys were fantastic, these captains. They knew everybody. He knew everybody at this particular funeral, and there were dozens of mourners and neighbors. I sat there kind

of quietly since it was my first visit outside the big brigade FOB. So to that degree it was not typical.

Usually we were at a COB for several days. Each day, generally speaking, there were three or four patrols. So there would be a morning patrol, an afternoon patrol, and a nighttime patrol. John and I would hop on at least two of them. Each patrol had a mission, obviously. The sergeant was instructed to visit Sheikh So and So, talk to him, show the flag, carry a big stick or smile pretty or whatever the circumstances called for, and provide Albin and Townsend all the time they needed with the sheikh. The commanders never hurried us. A lot of times it was just dropping stuff off. A lot of the captain's politics was based on giving stuff away. On that particular visit we rode in up-armored Humvees. We had several coils of razor wire to deliver to the sheikh. Sometimes a sheikh would want wire or maybe a pump, or some other *hadiyah* (gift). One of the things that I took to distributing was the eight-page weekly newspaper that was produced by the division's public affairs office or psy-ops. This may not sound like a big thing, but it was important because the Iraqis in the countryside had no local news. They'd listen to BBC or to the Iraqi stations or watch TV, but no one had local news. That's why these papers were important. It wasn't all US and Iraqi propaganda. The whole idea was to put Iraqis first, to "put an Iraqi face on things," as the expression went. The whole idea was to put the nationals first in Iraq and Afghanistan. That's part of COIN, to advance the status of the central government. This weekly newspaper was delivered to the brigade and then filtered down to the company. Of course the brigade commander didn't give a damn about these newspapers, so --

*Q: Were they in Arabic, or --*

ALBIN: Yes, in Arabic. He'd just throw a bundle into our Humvees when we left for a COB. The first time I saw them I asked "What are these?"

The civil affairs officer said, "These are the newspapers that we're to distribute to the local population."

I said, "Well, this is the first time I see them. Are they getting distributed? Are they reaching the audience?"

He said, "Not as far as I know. You'll have to ask the company commanders about that."

And I said, "OK, I'll ask." So on this first venture to the first company I asked the captain if he knew anything about the coalition force newspapers. He said no, he didn't. So I said, "OK, if I'm around next time I'll bring a stack." So (*laughs*), so I -- next time out I made sure that I had stacks of newspapers to distribute to the company commander. On the next visit to that COB I found out that the company commander had put the stacks of papers to good use. He was using them as stools at the plywood conference table in the lean-to shack used as a meeting room. He was using them as stools for us to sit on because he didn't have enough chairs or benches to go around. So we were sitting on the newspapers that he was supposed to be distributing in the community. After that I always took a



handful in the Humvee and gave them out to whomever we were talking to. Whether they read them or not I don't know, but at least they were getting into circulation. So much for the strategic information campaign at the company level.

*Q: Once you get them out, you know these things have a life of their own.*

ALBIN: Yes, it's one of the things that you realize when you go around and talk to the authorities in -- let's call it the provinces. I don't mean to be dismissive of this --

*Q: No, no, no, no.*

ALBIN: -- in the rural areas is that they have no news source. The sheikhs and the school principal, these are literate people.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: And Iraqis by and large are literate people. At that level.

*Q: For years, I remember when I came in 1950 being told Iraqi was ready for takeoff.*

ALBIN: Yes.

*Q: Because of the high rate of literacy.*

ALBIN: You are so right, Stu. That is absolutely right. So, to continue. A typical, approach at a company would vary according to the AO, according to the various circumstances that I've mentioned. For example, here's an example from the same Alpha Company I've been talking about. By this time John and I had been out with patrols during our visit. We noticed that there were irrigation pumps along the road that had been supplied years before under Saddam. They had come from various countries: maybe East Germany, Romania, Eastern Bloc countries from days of yore. The commander used CERP funds to replace or repair them. He would contract a local engineer to do the work. But the job was never done. The contractor would submit his invoice and get paid, but no one ever supervised or checked on the work. This was a frequent occurrence. The same for electricity substations that never worked, even though CERP money went for repairs. John and I were able report to the captain, "No sir, none of them has been installed. They are just as rusty as they were in Gulf I in 1990, for crying out loud."

He said, "No shit, that true? So I will have to go out there and look at it myself because my patrols aren't paying any attention to this." Sergeant, get your ass in here." And --

*Q: What was -- were you able to hear what happened? Was the contractor selling them to someone else, or what?*

ALBIN: This was a shoulder-shrug situation. I don't think the captain was focused on his responsibilities as contacting officer. I don't know about the pumping, the fate of the

pumping thing. Because we were never there long enough to reconcile our observations with their effects. This kind of corruption undermined the status of the Coalition as well as the government ... a lose-lose situation. But on the same trip we were able to watch the construction of a school. And John, being a kind of a handy guy, a jack of all trades, watched the construction very carefully. Whenever we were in the neighborhood of the school he would ask the patrol to stop. By the way, those patrols were put on oftentimes just for us. It was great access to the countryside. The HTS brass may have been dissatisfied with our social science research, but the commanders at various levels were perfectly satisfied with our reports. So they would put on patrols specially for us. Four Humvees. Imagine. Each Humvee with four soldiers in each. So four of them -- that's 16 going around with us, more if we were in MRAPs. That's a hell of a lot of manpower at risk. Commanders wouldn't have invested these resources if they weren't satisfied with what they were getting in return. Anyway, John asked the driver to stop at the school so he could watch it sequentially, over time. He judged that nothing he saw would have met code at any construction site that he was acquainted with in Haiti, Panama, or his other deployments. It was just rotten, slapdash work that was done by the contractor whom we knew to be a relative of the big sheikh whose condolence gathering we had attended. John reported to the company commander that he wasn't getting his money's worth. How much was this contract? He said, "\$100,000 is what I've given this guy." John said, "You could build three schools for \$100,000. And you can build 'em in Shawnee, Kansas for \$100,000. You're being ripped off." This was a typical situation.

*Q: Shrug.*

ALBIN: Yeah, there's nothing I can do about it. You can imagine the amount of Army paperwork that it took to get the project approved in the first place. So once the project was underway, whether it was a half-assed job or not, at least it was underway. And the captain, probably under no illusions that he was being taken for a ride, couldn't stop it because the locals depended on the work because there was no other employment. That's the essence of COIN... to get the damn school built. It's not important that he's being overcharged, or that there are no teachers or books or electricity or running water in the bathrooms. All of that is Inshallah stuff. You know what I mean? The same is true for the clinics with no doctors or nurses. We visited the brand new, spanking new clinics. Fully equipped. Autoclaves and everything but MRI machines. You would have loved to be sick there because it was so nice and clean. Well, was the clinic open for business? No. Was it ever likely to be? No. Was there a doctor there? No. Was there a nurse there? No. It was a building, fully equipped thanks to CERP money. Was the captain particularly proud of the, of the accomplishment? No. Because he knew that he was just jumping through hoops. This was part of the CERP operation. This is civil military affairs. This is hearts and minds stuff. He says, "I was trained at Fort Campbell to kick down doors. I was trained at Ft Bragg to jump out of airplanes not to build clinics and count money. What do I know about building clinics? But the village mayor told me he wanted a clinic. So I gave him a clinic (*laughs*)." Remember, infantrymen are not procurement officers, thank God.

So that's an average four-day sojourn with a company. Our living conditions varied between the primitive and the extremely primitive. We were always invited along with the commander to whatever he did. He once hosted what he called a Sheikh-a-Palooza. He invited all the local sheikhs inside the wire to the chow hall for a big Iraqi banquet catered for all the sheikhs of the region. We had a blast. It was very impressive, very informal, all of us together. It was a Sunni area. All were together against al-Qaeda, and everybody cussed out the Iranians and the government in Baghdad which they viewed as Iranian puppets. Everybody vented. The sheikhs probably came in expectation that they were going to enjoy an evening of Johnny Walker Black. But they had to be satisfied with Coke. The meal was stupendous. I met a lot of sheikhs that night that I would never have met ordinarily because they were scattered all over the AO. Here they were in one place. The event was a goldmine of contacts and information.

Let me try to pick up something that didn't turn out so well. When we were transferred from the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne down to the 1<sup>st</sup> Cav, down in Nasiriyah. The brigade commander was a very nice man, but really didn't know what to do with me. Once again, I had to create my own research agenda. This brigade didn't need to patrol much through the AO because it was a very quiet all Shia area. Not a Sunni for hundreds of miles. It was basically under control. There were pockets of bad things happening, but never any Qaeda like in Mahmudiyah or Anbar. The difficulties down there were rival Shia factions -- the Sadrists versus the Badrs, that is the JAM, the Jaysh-al-Mahdi, versus the Badr Corps, and the susceptibility to Iranian infiltration across the southern border in Basra Province which I described last week. The only people who were going out consistently were the PRT (Provincial Reconstruction Team). In this case the PRT was run by Italians. So they were not under State Department administration and only politely recognized the American brigade commander as the boss. There were a lot of State Department people *assigned* to Nasiriyah, Amarah, and Samawah but they were under Italian control. Anyway, I made friends with the PRT director who was an Italian lady. She put me on convoys that would take me to a wide variety of projects, water projects, schools, public health, and women's affairs projects. They were all very interesting. But my job was not to report to the PRT. My job was to report to the brigade colonel. I learned a lot about the AO, but I didn't learn anything that was of particular value to the colonel. One reason was that he was a pretty good communicator. He had weekly meetings with the PRT people, with all the civilian agencies who were there. So he was very much in the know himself, well-briefed by these civilians. Since the area was more or less calm, he wasn't required to send his patrols out in the same way that the Rakkasan guy did. So that three-month deployment was not as satisfying as the first one. Because I felt I wasn't productive, I left the country at the end of my contractual period, which was about 10 months. I returned home at the end of that period and resigned from HTS and its contractor BAE Systems. I cooled my heels back home here in Virginia for several months, when I got a call from Ft. Leavenworth. I was asked to teach the Iraq Area Studies course for the next batches of HTS trainees. I returned to Kansas to spend maybe four months designing, recruiting faculty for, and teaching the course at Fort Leavenworth. It was a hell of a good course, if I do say so myself, jam packed with history, anthropology, economics, women's topics, role playing, and language. Then I came back here to Springfield, Virginia, and I cooled my heels for another couple of

months because my teaching contract expired. I eventually decided to apply for HTS for a second tour. My application was accepted. I went back to Leavenworth to be processed for another tour. Eventually I was assigned to Anbar Province.

Now, before it gets too late, I want to say a word about Muna Aghawani, my research partner in Anbar Province. I think her experience and background merits some explanation. She is a young Palestinian-American who came to this country to finish her BA out in California. She is an absolutely brilliant young woman. She went to graduate school in economics at Cornell, where she finished all but her dissertation, got bored and signed a contract with HTS as a civilian social scientist like myself. In training she was one of the students in my Iraq Area Studies course. I had no idea that she would wind up as my associate in Iraq. She arrived at our duty station a couple of months before I did, in early 2010. She had established herself in the brigade by virtue of her intelligence and vivacity and by the time I arrived had become the brigade's mascot. I don't mean that in any condescending way. She was the go-to person whenever they had a cultural problem or cultural question. She did an *outstanding* job working her way into the brigade's operational rhythm and of establishing a research agenda and trying to stick to it despite shifting administrative and kinetic conditions. As an economist, she was interested in the Anbar economy. As a woman, she was interested in women's affairs. I think I recalled to you last week that she started a research project in the women's wing of the prison in Ramadi. We turned our attention, she and I, to all manner of topics. I won't say 'research projects', but topics that the brigade commander and staff were interested in. Her relations with the brigade commander were so easygoing that anything we proposed was OK with him, whether it had to do with tribal affairs, the economy, whether it had to do with constitutional questions regarding Iraq's federal system. We analyzed the kinetic situation in the province in ways that the MI people didn't. We analyzed political affairs such as the Arab Spring of 2011 or the influence of the old guard Ba'athis. Our proposals to COL Jennings or to the brigade commander COL Lartigue were almost always accepted. We didn't lack for research tasks. However our means were limited by hectoring from HTS administration in Baghdad and the lack of resources to conduct opinion polling, which Muna very badly wanted to conduct. Also, we were restricted in movement outside our compound. It was difficult to persuade Colonel Jennings, the guy in charge of our unit at provincial government headquarters, to go on patrols or training exercises. We had to make do with interviews of local tribe leaders, government officials, or contractors who visited our compound. We had close association with many of the PRT specialists, using them to expand our reach. Through the PRT's public diplomacy officer I met frequently with university faculty, school administrators and teachers, even librarians. The PA (public affairs) guy was a Foreign Service Officer and an excellent person for the tough job in Anbar. He was personable, committed, and indefatigable. He used my experience as a Fulbrighter to explain the program to Anbar University deans, faculty, and grad students. We worked together on English teaching and library projects, trying to put the American Corners program into efficient shape. The public diplomacy meetings expanded my contacts with the Anbaris. Our presentations to Colonel Lartigue's staff meetings were in the nature of consciousness raising among the officers. The idea was to let them know what community leaders were thinking, because most of the PRT personnel didn't communicate with the brigade. Communications were also poor

with the Corps of Engineers who kept to themselves and refused to attend brigade staff meetings. We would also talk about politics. There was hardly a meeting without discussion of the nefarious Iranians because that was what the officers were reading about in the media. This in Anbar, where there wasn't a Shia to be seen! Muna had to remind them of this all the time. We tried to keep discussion focused on local concerns. We kept repeating, "Sir, it's just not that way in the souk. We are not seeing Iranian influence in the political life of the province."

*Q: The reaching out -- well, we've gone through the whole Cold War. You know, there were communists hidden in labor unions. There were this -- you know, I mean there's a tendency to do this sort of thing, to have an enemy. And the enemy, I can remember during World War II, I mean there were Hitler supporters all over the place. And there were none (laughs).*

ALBIN: It's an easy answer, you know. Iranian influence was an easy explanation for people whose grasp of the local situation was superficial.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: And that brings me to a couple other points that I should make before the end of our session. Well, let me finish discussing Muna. We worked together for the better part of a year. As I described in detail last week, we spent a lot of time in the Provincial Council, and with provincial bureaucrats, and with the police force, especially with the police commander and various officers of the force because they were all in the same compound. We spent a good deal of time reading what was produced by the Intel people. Their reports flooded our email. I want to say something now about Army Intel. Stinks. It's unreliable and uninformed superficial analysis, nothing beyond what a good sergeant at company level could have turned out. The entire chain of reporting is suspect, from the snitches in the field, to the mosque reporting, to the images coming in from drones. I helped launch some of them, by the way. One day, at the big FOB in Ramadi, I was bored and wandered around the base. I noticed a small group of civilians doing some funny stuff out in the desert waste space. I walked over to them to find out what they were doing. Turned out that I had met them before in the DFAC (dining facility) and they talked about their work. They said they worked for a company call Scan Eagle that manufactures and operates drones.

I said, "Oh, that's interesting. What do you scan?"

So they said, "Why don't you come out and see?" So that's how I got wandering out into some bit of flat scrubland. They let me launch some of these birds. Afterwards, we went into the Intel shed to watch the monitoring screens. I watched the couple of guys assemble the machines like kits out of Toys R Us. I saw the robotics and electronics in the guts. It was all very fascinating. You know, they could run a province-wide surveillance, or kinetic operation if they were assigned to do it -- this happened to be surveillance -- out of a shed smaller than this room.

*Q: This room is about 15 by 15.*

ALBIN: Yeah. But they didn't need that room. All they really needed was a simple household tool kit and a bench to work on. It was amazing. I thought I'd go into the shed and find a sophisticated set up, but all they needed was some screwdrivers and Allen wrenches. Truly amazing.

*Q: What were they see -- I mean did they know what they were seeing?*

ALBIN: That's a very good question. It brings me to another little HTS contribution. I mentioned to you that the water level at Lake Haditha had gone down, so the caves were exposed high above the water's surface. They ran their birds close to the ground to survey the caves. Although they didn't find anything suspicious, it was worth the try. There was another contribution I hope I made. The day I went into the control shed where the specialists, the MI specialists -- 19 and 20-years-old kids-- were sitting in front of their screens and watching the birds as they flew over the highway east to Baghdad. Here's the scenario for that that day. There's one bird up. It is tracking a convoy, our convoy, going from Ramadi, which is maybe 60 miles or 60 kilometers from the city limits of Baghdad. There's a convoy going out and one coming back. So maybe there were two birds, I don't remember exactly. It's flying over on the four-lane highway that connects Ramadi to Baghdad. The drone is, is I think they told me, at about 3,000 feet following the lead truck. So that it's going along, following the lead truck. I ask the soldier and the contractor from Scan Eagle what exactly they're looking for.

"We're looking for IED's. We're looking for any funny business on the roadside either way, fifty feet on either side of the pavement."

I said, "Shouldn't the bird be running ahead of the lead vehicle? As it is, what you'll get is a great view of the boom."

And he said, "No, we want to see if there's any unusual activity."

And I said, "Why aren't you flying it 50 or 100 or 200 yards in front of the convoy? Because that's where you'll see the threat if there's a suspicious pile of rocks or rubbish. Why aren't you out there observing in front of the first vehicle instead of just tracking it?" The guys answered, "That's a good idea. That's a really good idea. I wonder why nobody thought of it? But we're supposed to do it this way."

Here's another idea. It gets me into a topic that I could go on all day with, namely the "whole of government" myth, which in the context of Iraq, meant that the synergy of minds, bureaucracies, resources, between the civilian side and the military side, between the State Department, USAID, the Marines, or the Army, the Corps of Engineers, DEA, etc. They're all located on the same FOBs. They operate in the same in the same geographic area. State's AO and Army's AO are the same. By virtue of the chain of command the brigade colonel and the PRT director are coevals. They are peers of

equivalent rank. If one is an SES, the other's got to be a general. If the one is an FS-1 or something, then the other's got to be a bird colonel, and so forth. They are supposed to be partners in every sense of the word. Well, believe me, they are not partners. Not in Nasiriyah or Ramadi. The colonels generally couldn't have cared less about the PRT and vice versa. In Ramadi especially it was the two of us, Muna and I, who encouraged the commander to pay heed to what the PRT was doing.

*Q: Just to interrupt, but in case we haven't done it before, PRT means provincial reconstruction team.*

ALBIN: That's correct, yes. Generally speaking run by a State Department official. Not always. The PRT down in Nasiriyah was run by the Italian Foreign Ministry. There were State Department personnel there, USAID personnel, but there were also Italian specialists and various other nationalities. But generally it's a State-run enterprise. In Afghanistan I'm not sure how it's divided, but the principle is the same. In Ramadi, the trouble was that the PRT leadership was worthless. There were alcohol problems and turf consciousness. But our idea was to ignore the leadership and incorporate the best of the civilian specialists into the dialogue and reporting with the brigade. Some of these specialists were had very good local contacts and offered significant input to the brigade staff.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: In any case, two or three PRT sections were extremely responsive to us. They brought us into contact with a number of Iraqi officials we would not otherwise have met. USAID operated a facility in central Ramadi that was protected from attack. Iraqis came there to meet with PRT officials. These were teachers, librarians, and university professors. There were NGOs and women's groups. They were able to mingle with American specialists and have productive discussions in a way that should have led to a successful future after December 2011 when we withdrew from the country. All of which should have led to continued long-term links between Iraq and the US. Unfortunately, that never materialized. But hopes were high during those final months, especially in the areas of education and agriculture. Unfortunately, for various circumstances I'll talk about next time, those ties collapsed. But it didn't in any way lessen the enthusiasm that I and a few PRT personnel felt for the mission. We really had a great thing going with the Iraqis at this facility. Similarly, the guy who was in charge of democracy and constitutional affairs, through our good offices, was able to be much more incorporated into the thinking of Colonel Lartigue's staff meetings than ever before, to the point where he became really a frequent attendee at the staff meetings and gave briefings on the Iraqi constitution and budgeting at the provincial and federal levels, something that had never happened before. So we were able to do some little bit toward breaking down the barriers between the civilian and the military sides.

I must mention here that during our time in Ramadi we observed that the leadership of the PRT was terrible, abysmal. I'm not sure how the PRT team leaders were chosen, maybe in Washington, maybe in Baghdad. But the appointments were irresponsible. The

leaders were either arrogant or drunks, or both. Now, Mona's approach to the PRT was very different from mine. Mine was a sort of a day-to-day approach where I helped university professors or high school teachers fill out Fulbright forms or help them get online to navigate State's education websites. That's all well and good, but my real objective was to talk to Iraqis in order to find out what they were thinking and how they viewed their future. As I explained earlier, Muna's job and mine was to spend as much time as possible with the provincial government. So that limited our association with the generality of Iraqis of all classes and occupations. So these PRT links, through the public affairs officer and the public health, agriculture and democracy officers, were invaluable to us. I learned a great deal about the provincial budgeting process. It became clear that most of what we heard in the Iraqi and Western media and Intel analysis was incorrect. The three of us, Muna, the governance guy and I, were able to clear up many misconceptions in our reporting to the brigade and division and through them to the Embassy.

So with that, let me wind up with just a word about my official position. Muna and I were Department of the Army direct hires. We were called DACs (Department of the Army Civilians). We were no longer contractors, we were actual Feds. Our deployment came to an end at the end of May or so in 2011. We left the country together. We traveled back to the States and were debriefed by the HTS authorities. By this time HTS had moved its headquarters from Fort Leavenworth, Kansas to Fort Eustis in Tidewater, Virginia. That's where we debriefed. Then I separated from the government and so did she.

*Q: As a woman, with obviously tremendous knowledge and experience, fit both within the American Military and with Iraqi society? I mean her contacts. Did you find this was a problem, or not?*

ALBIN: For her?

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: Oh, being an attractive 35-year-old woman with fluent Arabic, she received marriage proposals every time she went to a meeting.

*Q: How many goats was she offered (laughs)?*

ALBIN: Believe me, they would have given the whole flock and thrown in a couple of camels.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: She always fended them off with humor and good grace. She never wore a scarf or any kind of adaptive clothing. She wore modest clothes, but never tried to go incognito or go native. She was very good with people.



*Q: I mean was she able to get insights that others couldn't get?*

ALBIN: Oh, absolutely. For example, she was able to talk to women. Four or five council members were women. She was able to talk to them in ways that were impossible for me. Furthermore, because she was an Army person, she had complete access to the governor's office, to the deputy governors' offices, to provincial council offices. We had complete access. Except for Governor Qasim al-Fahdawi we didn't even need appointments.

*Q: Hello? Yeah, can I call you in about 10 minutes? OK, I'll call you in about 10 minutes. OK, bye. My daughter.*

ALBIN: Sounds exactly like my daughter. When she said, "Hi Dad," I thought, "That's Miriam!"

*Q: (laughs) She's a Dhahrani.*

ALBIN: She's a Dhahrani, is she? Ahh. Well, my Miriam is a Cairene. That's another story. When Elaine went into the hospital in Cairo, it was, it was like going into the most primitive maternity ward you can imagine.

*Q: We had -- Vicky went to an Air Force hospital, which was a real Air Force hospital.*

ALBIN: In Dhahran, yes, of course! Yes. Oh. Well. What's your daughter's name?

*Q: Victoria. OK, well anyway, you were saying about the --*

ALBIN: Oh yeah. Much of the time Muna and I, went to meetings together. So with regard to interpersonal relations, with the people we were visiting, there was always a man -- meaning me -- with her as well as an armed American soldier or officer. Because we were so valuable to the detachment and to the brigade, they didn't want us sniped or kidnapped when we went outside our little installation into the government buildings. So we always had an armed soldier with us, usually one of the detachment's officers, who in turn had to have a couple of armed soldiers with him by regulation. We were always a small force of people going into these government offices. Muna had nothing to fear from these people. She got along just fine. There was much joking and small talk. We knew about their families, relatives, business investments, and financial difficulties.

There is an Iraqi joke I came across the other day I want to end with today, before I forget it. Let's leave Mona aside for a moment, and we'll pick her up next time.

*Q: Oh yeah, we'll pick another date.*

ALBIN: OK, we'll, we'll get there. In the days of Saddam a man goes into a store on Rashid Street, a video store, and says to the guy at the counter, he says, "Do you have pornographic movies?"

Fellow says, "Yeah, we carry pornographic movies."

He says, "Do you carry homosexual pornographic movies?"

Says, "Yeah, we've got those."

He says, "Do you have pornographic homosexual movies with young boys in them?"

Says, "Yeah, we, we carry those."

He says, "Do you carry pornographic homosexual movies with a young boy who looks exactly like the boy in 'Terminator 2'?"

He says, "Yeah, I got a video like that."

So the guy buys the movie and goes home. Couple of days later he comes back with the video. He says, "This isn't a pornographic movie with a young boy." He says, "This is a video of Saddam giving a two-hour speech."

And the man looks at him, gimlet-eyed, and says, "Well, did you enjoy it?"

And the customer says, "Oh yes!"

*Q: (laughs)*

*ALBIN: (laughs)*

*Q: We'll stop there.*

*ALBIN: Things to talk about.*

*Q: All right. Today is the 30<sup>th</sup> of July, 2013 with Mike Albin. And Mike, I'll let you turn over. We're sort of wrapping up. But you've got various things you want to talk about.*

*ALBIN: Yeah, there are lots of things, Stu, to follow up on. We talked about the Shia-Sunni split as I observed it during the deployments that I had. So I might as well start there. In spite of what we read or read at the time and what analysts and journalists said the majority of the mayhem in Iraq was caused by Shia leadership, such as Sadr, and the Hakim brothers and their militia called Badr Corps. There was also the putative intervention of the Iranians. It seemed to me at the time as an analyst at army brigade level, that this was a misdirected accusation at the Shia. Because what we had, if you wanted to have a well-rounded picture of the violence in Iraq you had to include the Sunnis and you had to include al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda was a major Sunni force that was in league, as I think I mentioned before, with leftover nationalist forces, diehard nationalist forces, of a Ba'athi stripe. They, in link with al-Qaeda, reigned supreme in certain parts*

of the country, particularly Anbar Province and what was called the Sunni Triangle, Saladin province, Anbar and parts of the Mahmudiyah district south of Baghdad. They were also active in Diyala. Insurgency in these areas led eventually to Petraeus's request of the Bush administration for more support, more manpower support, which was supplied in what is called the Surge. This tactic did a magnificent job in Anbar Province. I'll not get into chronological details here. By the time I arrived for my first tour in Mahmudiyah district in '08, the Surge had done its work and the area was so secure that my team and I could move around pretty freely. Saladin Province and Diyala Province, were also hotbeds of this sectarian strife and in the case of Diyala, there was the Kurdish element to deal with. The biggest hit, the biggest success that al-Qaeda had in provoking sectarian hatred was their attack on the holy Shia shrine in Samarra in early 2006.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: That set the country aflame. Resulting eventually in the Surge. It took two years for the surge to succeed, during which time things were very ugly, as we all remember. Now here's my point. The surge wasn't the only -- in fact it wasn't even the most important element in the eventual damping down of the civil war. When I made my first deployment there I was able to move around my area of operation freely because the kinetic situation was much calmer by spring of 2008. There was no question about it. I couldn't have done the prowling around the area in small patrols that I described last week if the situation had been as inflamed. In any case, the surge and excellent leadership on the part of the Corps commander and *very* close cooperation with the State Department in the form of cooperation between Petraeus and Crocker, Ambassador Chester Crocker, was ideal. I listened to their briefings on the intercom but I never observed firsthand this cooperation. But there's no gainsaying that if you could put Crocker and Petraeus together in a war, things would be all right. It was kind of like Marshal Dillon and the Lone Ranger together riding to the rescue. But they weren't the only ones. In fact, they may not have been the most important factors in winning the war. And as I mentioned last week, we did in fact win the war in Iraq. We're losing the peace now, but that's another story. The Awakening, the Sahwa, in Anbar Province was equally important in suppressing al-Qaeda. Abdul Sattar Abu Risha, who was assassinated after he got his fellow sheikhs organized into a coherent movement called the Awakening had a critical effect on violence in Anbar and on transmission of violence across provincial borders. So the Awakening was an enormous benefit to the war effort, both from the Iraqi point of view and from the U.S. Coalition point of view. The third main contributor to the success of the war and the calm that began in 2008 and extended to 2011 when we left was Maliki's own tough stance, as I described to you before, both in the Battle of Basra and in the Battle of Sadr City. He showed more spine and fiber than ever I would have expected. I bet he surprised the hell out of Crocker and Petraeus and the follow-on generals, Odierno and Austin. I suspect they saw that the guy was not just the dumb pol, the unknown pol, whom they had to put up as a compromise prime minister in 2005, but that he had some fiber to him. He did a marvelous job suppressing rebellious Shia forces, that is, his erstwhile Badr and Sadr allies.

*Q: Mike, I wonder if you could talk about as you saw it -- and we're talking about this*

*time -- of war in Iraq, about the dynamics. I mean was this, as usually war -- a bunch of people, maybe religious leaders or political leaders, fomenting and saying -- in order for power, or was this pure religiosity boiling over? How did we see this? Not we, but how did you see this?*

ALBIN: What I told different commanders and their staffs was that it was a combination of sectarian hatred fanned by constant provocative terrorism, such as the bombing at Samarra. There was also a heavy element of thuggery, gangsterism, and opportunism on the part of cut-throats and extortionists. This criminality helped to fund the main terrorist organizations and militias. For example, one of the tactics was kidnapping. Every faction had its group of thugs or gangs, who would go out and kidnap for ransom. I don't think they actually wanted to kill. The idea was to gouge money out of the family. Many hundreds of families paid up. That filled the coffers of al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), Badr Corps, and Muqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army. These groups exploited the general breakdown after our occupation began. Robbing banks was easy, like in the old stagecoach days in the movies. As we all know, the Treasury Department had sent literally tons, planeloads of cash. So whenever possible the gangs would hold up convoys carrying American dollars. A classmate of my son, after he graduated from University of Richmond, -- worked as a contractor for the US Treasury Department. His job was to carry cash to banks. This put him in the line of fire and he was wounded in a hold up. I visited him at Walter Reed after he'd been medevaced home from Iraq. Lots of people, lots of analysts have differing views of Sadr himself. He was probably the most well-known and universally hated personality of the insurgency. But he was not the only one. The Hakim brothers of a rival Shia faction were violent in the extreme, terrorists in their own right. But they weren't al-Qaeda. I think in the mind of a lot of the commanders I interacted with there was no difference between the Shia side and the Sunnis, that is, AQI and its allies. There was in fact a great distance between the two. I don't think it is true to say that Muqtada al-Sadr's outfit or Ammar al-Hakim's outfit killed and tortured for its own sake, sadistically, and with the idea of *raw terror*. Other observers will dispute that. But overall I think it would be safe to say that while there were gangs that were free-lancers who perpetrated all kinds of awful things, let's agree that it was not in the Shia plan to implement its goals by terrorism. They didn't have to because they had the ballot box on their side. For al-Qaeda, on the other hand, terror was their bread and butter. I think that was the reason for the torture houses that we saw, and the mass graves. AQI was also calculating. They kidnapped and married local women and girls in Sunni areas so they could forge links with the tribes and subsequently control them. If the father of the bride protested or in any way stood in the way of the marriage, he was killed. This brutal strategy is what generated the Awakening in Anbar Province. I have no doubt of it.

*Q: Well now, was al-Qaeda seen as an outside organization, outside of Iraq? Or was it indigenous by the time you were there?*

ALBIN: By the time I was AQI was perceived as a foreign dominated, foreign directed, entity that recruited local malcontents in Anbar, Nineveh, Saladin and Diyala, but was not run from inside. By the time I got there the first time, al-Qaeda in the Mahmudiyah area of Baghdad province, which I remind you was a rural area, had been pretty much

eliminated from the scene. By that same first deployment, in Nasiriyah, 300 miles south of where I was first, al-Qaeda never existed in force anyway. Now, in my second deployment, Anbar Province had been ground zero for the Sunni resistance, the insurgency. By 2010, al-Qaeda was on the run. Al-Qaeda had almost been eliminated as a major force in the insurgency. What the insurgency consisted of in 2010 into 2011 was those nationalist -- and those Ba'athi -- remnants.

*Q: -- al-Qaeda, as was manifested in Iraq, have anything besides blowing up things? I mean --*

ALBIN: They had no government.

*Q: -- was there an ideology or something?*

ALBIN: If you mean was there a commanding text, no. Was there a little green book or a little red book or Ten Commandments? Nothing that signaled leadership or direction. There were only some shoddily made videos of IEDs targeting Humvees and some videos of terrorist training sites with a couple of dozen trainees doing jumping jacks.

*Q: What was the -- I mean outside of if you didn't go along you'd get killed, what was the attraction to al-Qaeda?*

ALBIN: Money. I think military intelligence at the brigade, battalion, and company level was finding, and I had no reason to dispute it because I had never found anything to contradict it, that kids or out of work people would be paid 100 bucks or 150 bucks to plant a roadside IED. It was just cash that drove the actual terrorism by the time I got there. By the time I got in country in my second deployment, in '10, there were few coordinated attacks against American or Iraqi Army or Iraqi Police positions. There were very few. There were some but they were isolated, not coordinated. They served the purpose of keeping the pot on simmer, not on boil, if you follow me. The IEDs, VBIEDS, the Vehicle Borne IED's, mortar attacks, even the suicide attacks were desultory, unpredictable, un-patterned, and probably carried out by people who were paid to do it for a minimum amount of money. There was one other group commonly cited by MI as perpetrators. Those were the mentally handicapped or the lame. These were the kind of people who walked into the government center in Ramadi and blew themselves up. This happened a couple of times. We have no way of verifying this. But it was commonly thought that people who did that kind of thing were recruited from the population of mentally handicapped or people who had nothing else to lose. That was the recruitment population as we understood it. Whether that was the case or not, I couldn't verify.

*Q: Were you seeing -- I don't know what you'd call it -- a tenseness? Or I mean were the Shia and the Sunni people sort of really separated from each other at the time?*

ALBIN: Well, I don't know if you read people like George Packer of The New Yorker magazine or maybe Anthony Shadid or some of the mainline journalists-- there are other

names but those two come to mind -- who spent time in Baghdad or other cities. They observed that the Shia were taking over large portions of Sunni neighborhoods. So I've got to believe that it was actually happening, that there was a concerted effort on the part of the victorious Shia militia forces to vacate the Sunni population from areas of Adhamiyah, for example, in Baghdad, in order to repopulate them with Shia families. The concrete restraining walls, T-walls, and checkpoints solidified these occupations. A major scholar, an historian by the name of Michael Izadi whose avocation is mapmaking, has demonstrated these changes by means of maps and charts that you can find on the internet. So I think it's fair to say that there was a population shift in Baghdad and that was unfortunate. And I think what's happening is that some of today's sourness between the Sunnis and the Shia is caused by that era when the Shia kicked the Sunni out of their quarters of the city. Let me say parenthetically here -- I'm going outside my area of -- and my era of deployment -- that as recently as this month when I go to the iftars that I told you about, these dinners in the evening during Ramadan, I talk to Iraqis informally, just chitchatting, that the strength of the distrust between the communities is as strong today as it probably was in 2007 or 2006 in Baghdad. They have carried these hard feelings with them. And I could tell you stories. I won't, because it might give away the identities of people, but people feel *very strongly* about their identity as a Sunni, their identity as a Shia, and how they feel threatened -- or how their families back in Baghdad feel threatened by the other side.

*Q: Well, my background is I spent five years in Yugoslavia, in Serbia. And looking on results there, one can put the finger of blame to much of what happened there on the, the clergy on both sides, the orthodox and the Christian clergy. Basically, teaching hatred.*

ALBIN: Yes, I understand.

*Q: With lots of history. And I mean not quite as far as the Sunni-Shia thing, but going back to well, maybe 800.*

ALBIN: Yes, sure.

*Q: AD.*

ALBIN: Sure!

*Q: But anyway, what about what passes for the clergy?*

ALBIN: Thank you for bringing that up. I'm reading a book now by Nir Rosen, published in maybe '07 or '08. It's not a bad book. I'm reading it not for overall analysis, but for the detail he adds to places in Iraq that I never visited. He emphasizes the hatred and vitriol preached by certain of Muqtada's allies from the pulpit, Shia clerics who inflamed hatred in Sadr City, other parts of Baghdad, and Basra. By the way, the Shia parties all had their media outlets. Meanwhile their message was carried in Lebanon and Iran. In Lebanon, the flagship TV station was al-Manar. The entire Shia world was getting its message. These stations became international propaganda machines. So in

Rosen's telling, there was a good deal of sectarian troublemaking from the pulpit on the Shia side. We know that certain figures on the Sunni side were *constantly* stirring the pot from pulpits in Mosul and Anbar, especially Fallujah. Let me put a little twist to Rosen's recounting to say this. When I got overseas the first time in '08, one of the things that I did was to get a hold of the reporting on the Friday sermons in my area of operation and in all other parts of the country that I could get access to via Army Intel. I continued till the end of the second deployment. Believe me, I rarely came across Sunni or Shia sermons that were overtly fomenting of sedition against the government. I'm talking about '09 to '011. These were the years of cooling down. So, those sheikhs and imams who were firebrands when Rosen was reporting had calmed down toward the end of the occupation. In Anbar I met many of the province's religious leaders, including the leaders of the Islamic Council, an official Sunni group. I was in meetings with them, I listened to their speeches when they came to the government center. Occasionally -- once or twice -- I had extended conversations with them, with the political officer from the PRT and with my HTS colleague. These guys were ordinary clergymen. They were not preaching hatred. What they were preaching that the Americans caused all the strife between the sects and that they wanted to return to the "golden age," not of Saddam but of harmony.

*Q: Now, was the golden age including -- this is Saddam's period?*

ALBIN: Yeah. Well, I was in a Sunni province, after all. While not a hero -- believe me, Saddam was not a hero to the Anbaris -- but he was not the same kind of absolute devil incarnate that he might have been to the Shia in Southern Iraq. Let me make a digression here, because this is important. After Gulf I in '90, '91, and thereafter, we put an umbrella of security over the Kurdistan area, a no-fly zone. This was good. Where we made a mistake was in leaving Iraq too soon. This was a misguided move that we and the Iraqis are still paying for. We should have established a no-fly zone over southern Iraq too. Remember that after 1991 the people who suffered most from Saddam's predations were the Shia of the south. They revolted in '91 and Saddam put them down in a vicious, genocidal way. We did nothing to assist them. Closing off Iraq's airspace north and south would have left Saddam with a truncated bit of territory to use as his playground.

*Q: I'm sure we were looking in very closely. What was your reading on Iranian influence in this whole thing during the time you were there?*

ALBIN: During the time I was there minimal, minimal influence. I think I've touched on this earlier. The Iranians, through the Revolutionary Guard Corps/Quds Force and strategist Qasem Soleimani had a malicious, deleterious influence on the security situation in Iraq by means of the smuggling of fighters and the terrible armor-piercing EFPs. These came into the country most probably through the Shatt al-Arab territory south of Basra, in my opinion. As I mentioned to you before, John Townsend and I flew over the border between Iraq and Iran, looking for influences of any kind, traces, paths, warehouses, clusters of automobiles, pick-ups, lorries, *mashufs* (pirogues) or anything indicating some sort of regular path for smuggling people or arms. We found absolutely nothing. If smuggling of that stuff was going on, and I'm *sure* it was, it was probably in the far south of the country along the estuary of the Shatt al-Arab or maybe through

Kurdistan through trade over the mountains to Iran. These areas were outside my territory. All I got was reports from time to time from the south from my colleagues who were with the HTS team down in and around Basra. What was tricky for me was trying to explain to brigade staffs the difference between military, political, economic and cultural influence of Iran. The regnant belief was that Iran was behind all of the violence we were seeing in the country from 2008 onward. This view did not jibe at all with the intel I was seeing. Our officers in Anbar, for instance, were picking this up from the locals, who saw Qasem Soleimani under their beds at night. But at the same time, I tried to get them to recognize that Iran had many interests in Iraq. Most of the agricultural produce came from Iran, many of the manufactured goods (the stuff that didn't come from China, that is), the pilgrims to the holy shrines, the hajj via Iraq to Hejaz, etc, etc. Iranian goods flooded the Iraqi market. Iranian pilgrim spending funded huge development projects in Najaf and Karbala. They also brought in billions of dollars of investment capital. Because the borders were porous, buses full of pilgrims came in, and planeloads too. This was nothing new. The pilgrimage has been going on for centuries. Naturally some bad guys infiltrated along with the pilgrims. However, whatever influence they may have had as propagandists, munitions suppliers, fifth columnists or whatever was not the driving force of the civil war. Iran provided a refuge for Muqtada al-Sadr, the Hakims, Nouri al-Maliki and others. In fact, it may be true to say -- I may be mistaken here -- that the elder Hakim brother died in Iran when he was there for treatment of emphysema. But in any case, the fact that Iran was an R&R (rest and relaxation) destination for bad guys is undeniable. Of course it was also a place to plan strategy and arrange arms deliveries. Similarly (*laughs*) it was said, and I saw videos to support this, that the Iranians were operating a kind of outreach to Sunni leaders too. They would visit Iran, meet leaders, tour, and have fun. Some Sunni leaders would be photographed in Iran, which didn't do them much good back in Anbar Province, especially when the photographs showed them cavorting with scantily clad Iranian prostitutes. These events or the videos of them may have been bogus, but they were widely seen and discussed in our conversations.

*Q: Yeah. Tell me, how did you read as a factor -- or was it a factor -- the fact that when, you know, looking back historically, Iran is Persia and Iraq is Arab.*

ALBIN: Uh-huh.

*Q: And this Arab-Persian thing, which is not a, a good mix.*

ALBIN: That's right. And to this --

*Q: But how was it -- I mean, you know, OK, you're a fellow religionist and all, but, but gee, you're a Persian or gee, you're an Arab.*

ALBIN: Yes.

*Q: How'd that play?*

ALBIN: Oh, it played and continues to play a fundamental cultural role in the relations



between the two countries. And the disdain that Iranians feel for Arabs in general is profound, rude, crude, and visceral.

*Q: Ragheads.*

ALBIN: Ragheads, to the Persians, to the Iranians.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: It comes through all the time. At one of the *iftars* I went to this last week the hostess was an Iranian. My conversation with her started in Arabic. I introduced myself to the lady and we started small talk and chitchat at the dinner table. And I said, “What do you do?”

She said, “I teach Arabic.”

And I said, “Oh, that’s very interesting. Where do you teach?” “At X University,” she answered?”

And I said, “Oh, how’s business?”

Oh, she said, “The classes are filled and we can’t keep up with demand.” We continued small talk along these lines. Seated next to her was a young woman. The Arabic professor began speaking to her in Farsi.

I said to the professor, “Oh, you, you speak Persian.”

She said, “Yes, I’m Iranian.”

“Oh, but you’re an Arabic teacher?”

“Oh yes, I graduated from Such and Such University with a degree in Arabic.” As our conversation proceeded it became clear that although she admired Arabic as an important and historic language, it could not match Persian for “eloquence and sensitivity, especially the poetry.” As to the Arabs themselves, it was clear she didn’t think much of them or their culture. Persian food is better. Persian men are more handsome; and on and on as we conversed. So you see these views persist even now, right here in Fairfax County. That’s on the cultural side. On the religious side, the Shia religion is the great tie that binds the Iraqis and Iranians. There is rivalry between Najaf and the Iranian seat of learning, Qum, but from what I have observed these are not mortal differences. Many of Iraq’s leading clerics are of other ethnicities, including Iranian. I’m not versed enough to know whether there are deep cultural or ethnic animosities. I suspect rivalries are as much intellectual as anything. As regards the Sunnis, they wouldn’t pay a whole lot of attention to Iran culturally or religiously if they didn’t have this ineradicable belief that that Iranians control the central government. Here isn’t the place to cover the Ottoman-Safavid/Qajar times, or even the Iraq/Iran war of the 1980s. So, in my observation the

feelings between the Iraqi Shia and the Iranian Shia at the highest level of theological training and intercultural exchange are “correct,” as the State Department might say. Not anymore than correct. You have to remember two salient points. One is that the Iranians established a theological center in Qum, south of Tehran that is in direct competition with the Hawza (theological seminary establishment) of Najaf. The schools compete for students worldwide, and they even have competing ecumenical outreach programs and facilities. I don’t think there’s much love lost between the Iranian clergy and the Iraqi clergy, but I’m no expert. One of the things I tried to follow was the visits of Iranian clergymen to Iraq. There’s practically no media coverage of it. Do they come to Najaf and Karbala to do their pilgrimages? Sure. But they’re not paraded in the media. So it’s not surprising that Ahmadinejad’s visit to Najaf and Karbala this past week was without media fanfare.

*Q: Talking about --*

ALBIN: He was just a pilgrim. Yeah.

*Q: Let me stop for just a -- OK. We’re going to -- yeah, go ahead. We were leaving -- we’re moving to the army for a while now.*

ALBIN: Leaving the subject of sectarianism and Iraqi religion, let me just talk about some of my observations about the Army. When I went to Iraq the first time in ’09, and then extended to the end of my second tour in ’11, the Army and Coalition Forces were moving away from a kinetic posture to an ‘advise and assist’ mission. The COIN strategy that I discussed earlier was quietly set aside in recognition of the fact that Iraq had been pacified, if you’ll pardon the expression. The main job now for Coalition Forces was to train and assist the IP (Iraqi Police), the IA (Iraqi Army) the generic term for all of which was Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). In training the IP, the US Army didn’t have a whole lot of police manpower, so it dipped into our American civilian population and contracted with a lot of police -- retired police officers, and brought them over on contract to train the Iraqi Police. They sat with Iraqi police officers Iraqi bureaucrats at the Ministry of Interior level and at the provincial level to train them and introduce them to modern concepts of human rights and the rule of law. They also trained the IP in weapons handling, range work, crowd control and other technical essentials. My own experience with these guys in Ramadi was very positive. They were hardworking and committed. In most cases they had good relations with their counterparts. They were an outstanding group of older or middle-aged men, people retired from major urban police forces in the U.S. Some of them were retired from military police careers. They were all thoroughgoing professionals. In my observation the Iraqis respected them and they respected the Iraqis. As to the Army, it had a huge role in training. Our unit was the Fourth Brigade of the Third Infantry Division. It was assigned to Ramadi to advise and assist the Iraqi Army, which had its headquarters in another part of town. There was constant backing and forthing between our FOB and the IA division headquarters commanded by a lieutenant-general. Relations between our brigade commander and his staff and the Iraqi staff, between our American division and the Iraqi forces in Ramadi as far as I could tell were outstanding. There was constant visiting back and forth between

the two bases, daily meetings, daily comparing of notes, daily training sessions, daily guidance from our colonel and often from general officers who came out from Baghdad. There was of course intelligence sharing, but I knew little about that.

At one point we had an American one-star based at our FOB in order to be as close as possible to the lieutenant-general who was running the IA. That worked out very well. Then his division was withdrawn from Iraq and a new division came in, at which time it was decided not to deploy a general officer to Ramadi anymore, and that the entire brass structure would stay in Camp Liberty close to Baghdad. I think I'm right about that, but I never had close contact at division level and I visited Camp Liberty only once. Our commander maintained those close relations with the IA. I participated, as an observer not as a participant, numerous times at meetings at IA headquarters. The IA commander was an older fellow whose health grew increasingly weak as the year went on. Late in the year he was often in Baghdad or even out of the country for heart treatment. He was often replaced at these meetings by his deputy. Let me give you an example of a typical meeting between an Iraqi commanding general and his US Army counterpart. This took place in 2008 in Mahmudiyah south of Baghdad city. John Townsend and I were invited to accompany our colonel to a meeting of tribal leaders convened by Major General Ali Jasim. His intention was to convince the sheikhs of the importance of peace and calm during the forthcoming parliamentary election, a critical juncture in Iraq's democratic development. He was trying to head off any kind of sectarian strife at the polls. He explained to the sheikhs how the prime minister and the ministries of Defense and Interior were in link with Coalition Forces and State Department and how the polling was to proceed. The sheikhs filled the room. General Ali sat there in his gruff and commanding way. Ironically, he was very likeable and charismatic too. He said, "This is the way it's going to be. We're going to have an inner circle around the polling place, and that's going to be staffed by the Iraqi Police. Next, we're going to have a circle around that. It's going to be manned by the Iraqi Army. "And what is the role of the," – pointing to the American general seated beside him, "and what is the role of our brother Americans here? Our brother Americans are going to be watching us from upstairs." That was the way the meeting was run. I don't recall that the sheikhs had any substantive questions. There were a couple of desultory questions from them, some of whom I recognized as real rotters because we had met with them on our patrols and they had very bad reputations regarding bribery and cheating the U.S. on CERP contracts. Anyway, the meeting went well because it was led by the Iraqi side. Part of the advise and assist method was to "put an Iraqi face" on decision making and public pronouncements. Although General Ali didn't need any American help in running his AO, he was always very keen to include the American brass in whatever he was doing, just like our brass was keen on including him on whatever we were doing. So this business of putting an Iraqi face on everything was quite smooth with GEN Ali Jasim.

In Ramadi a year later it was a little more difficult because, first of all, the commanding general was often absent for health reasons. He was a strong-willed guy. I was in many meetings with him and local leaders, tribal leaders and civilian leaders. He was a very forceful, persuasive speaker with a distinguished career. People respected him, the populous respected him. But he just wasn't in good physical shape anymore, probably

approaching 70-years-old, I'd say. At the company level, advise and assist meant this. Groups of our soldiers were assigned to an Iraq company. Our squad went with an IA company to practice patrolling a village, searching a house, kicking down doors, covering each other, protecting a dismounted patrol, and many other details. Here's one example that comes to mind. One day we went out, John Townsend and I, with a small advisory patrol. We met the Iraqi side. We stood on the sidelines with the sheikh on whose property this drill was being conducted. On the property was an abandoned school, in a grove of palm trees. The first part of the morning was given over to American soldiers showing the Iraqis how to surround and take down (occupy and search) a building, how to enter a room, how to throw the occupants of a room against a wall or on the floor, how to search them, search rooms for weapons or guys who looked like they didn't belong there, or young men, and handling prisoners. The second part of the morning was chalk talks. Or they would take out gas masks to show how they worked. They would strip M-16's and AK47s and compare them. Again, mechanics. Then we would go to lunch. If the sheikh happened to be in a generous mood (because, for example, he'd been cheating the Army on contracts) he'd put on a nice lunch for us. There was a long table and we had rice and lamb and chicken and so forth. If he was a more niggardly type, we'd just get in our Jeeps (HUMVEEs), go back to base and call it a day. So that's the kind of advise and assist pattern that developed between Americans and Iraqis. During my second tour, I would occasionally go to the formal training camp at the old British Habbaniyah Air Base in Fallujah. But these were not very productive visits for me because everyone, American and Iraqi, was too busy for interviews, so I mostly declined invitations to accompany our guys.

*Q: What was -- you mention them all the time -- but the role, again as you saw it, the role of the sheikhs and the tribes?*

ALBIN: In the Mahmudiyah jurisdiction and in the far south, it was a *very* important role. But in my opinion, and what I tried to emphasize to the commander and his staff, was that we Americans, the Coalition Forces, could overemphasize the importance of tribalism and the importance of the sheikhs. What do I mean by that? Since tribalism in rural Iraq is a paramount social phenomenon we can't ignore it and its relationships and hierarchies. It's important to be aware of who's who in the structure. That goes without saying. Similarly with sheikhs. The sheikh of any tribe or sub-tribe is an important person in his sphere. However, a given sheikh may be important in his own right or important by ascription. He's like an ambassador, if I may use a State Department analogy. An ambassador is accorded a certain amount of status and stature by virtue of his position. Behavior, effectiveness, and influence will differ from individual to individual. Some will be weak and some will be super influential in the field and in Washington. Mike Mansfield comes to mind. You get my point. So there is the ascriptive importance of a sheikh and there is the personal charisma or the personal force of a sheikh. One of the things that I tried to get across was this distinction. I got the impression that during training at Ft. Leavenworth or elsewhere that officers came away thinking that the Iraqi sheikhs are all-powerful and that to understand the tribe was to understand Iraq. In Anbar there were some little tribes in terms of populations which might be more important than some bigger sub-tribes because of the charisma or leadership qualities of the sheikh or

because of his connections in Baghdad, or because of something his grandfather had done. Similarly, sheikhs might have important connections in the Gulf, in Dubai or Abu Dhabi or Saudi Arabia. So one of the things that Muna and I tried to do was to keep track of who was who. Who was in the know and who had power. I won't mention names. With the exception of those names that appear in the newspaper, like Abu Risha's I won't bring those names up. But there are many sheikhs of distinguished heritage with parochial control over important elements of Anbar's population but who themselves have very little influence at the provincial level. One of our missions was to try to figure out who was important in terms of the hierarchy of influence in the province. A given sheikh, although he had an impeccable genealogy, might be a very weak leader. It wasn't that he was old or poor. It's just that he wasn't forceful enough to have influence either in Ramadi or in Baghdad at the national level. So he was kind of bypassed by other sheikhs.

Here's an example of what we tried to do. I'm talking about the influence of sheikhs. It gets kind of complicated. In a province like Anbar which had a sophisticated, well-run government infrastructure with close bureaucratic links to Baghdad, a provincial legislature that actually occasionally demonstrated political influence, and that had a strong provincial governor the state structure was strong. In other words, the infrastructure of Anbar, from a civilian, non-tribal point of view, from a modern point of view, was strong. Not everybody worked hard and not everybody was honest, but there was real government. That, perforce, limited the influence of sheikhs because it was difficult for them to penetrate the government structure except through bribery or *wasta* (the influence of intermediaries) And that's why the provincial governor and his more honest office directors were able to run a development program that was halfway satisfactory and had a budget that was in balance. Governor Fahdawi had cockamamie ideas and some wasteful visions for sure, in our opinion. But by and large he ran an operating government. In Mahmudiyah in the rural part of Baghdad province there was no significant administrative structure. So the sheikhs in my observation had a much more important role in brokering influence between the population and essential government functions. Does that make sense?

*Q: It does, yeah.*

ALBIN: So now, how do I prove the assertions I just made regarding the centrality and importance of the Baghdad government? Let's take the Arab Spring as an example. I wanted to talk about it anyway today and this is a good time to interject it. The Arab Spring came to Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, spreading around the region in diverse forms. It began as a positive popular upheaval that sought to replace corrupt older dictatorial regimes with democratic structures in "power to the people" kind of movements. All well and good. I followed this, as all Iraqis did, on satellite TV, on Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya TV and on the local Iraqi TV stations, Baghdadiyah, al-Iraqiya, Sumaria, al-Furat, Sumaria, BBC and Alhurra. These media provided excellent coverage, especially of Cairo. Generally, I watched them on the TV in the TOC (tactical operations center) of our brigade. The TOC became a gathering point for officers and many of the translators who were interested in these events. I was the chief translator and interpreter for them. All of us, the army, the intel people, at division and brigade level were all interested to see if

Iraqis were going to copy their brother Arabs in an Arab Spring. Let me talk about Anbar. I won't give you an exact date. I can't remember, I'll have to go back to my notes, but let's say by the time the Egyptian upheaval started in Tahrir Square in January 2011 the Arab Spring enthusiasm was at its height in Anbar. What did that mean? It meant that the governor and the provincial council and the ISF had their eye on what the 'street' was going to do to. Were they going to join in the movement? Would it be directed against Maliki the Prime Minister? Would the tribes join in, and if so, which ones? Would there be violence? Would the ISF be able to control the situation? What should the Coalition do if things turned violent? I'm perfectly convinced that most political leaders, the provincial council, the security leaders, the provincial chief of police and the army general, didn't give a damn what the people's will was. If the mob wanted to throw the incumbents out they could go ahead and try to throw them out. I also think that Governor Fahdawi was as enthusiastic, in his modulated way, about the Arab Spring as everybody else. What everyone feared was accompanying violence. As it turned out, they gave an Arab Spring and nobody came. It was I think a very big disappointment that the Anbaris didn't have a real uprising. The police and army, the IA, were prepared for trouble and the politicians were expecting the worst. Our brigade was working closely with the IA and IP in monitoring the streets round the clock. We were watching drone images all the time in the TOC. In the end, nothing significant happened. The provincial government including the security forces succeeded in convincing the sheikhs to be quiet. Many of the big absentee sheikhs, al-Hayis, for example or the Dulaimi paramount Ali Hatem, tried to incite trouble, but the local authorities damped down the paltry demonstrations and the population pretty much ignored them.

Let me get back to the tribal topic. During those weeks in early 2011, a few youths came out into the street and a few guys marched carrying placards saying "down with this and down with that." I'd have to go back to my notes to see the actual slogans. A couple of things were remarkable. There was no sectarian animus, number one. Number two, the crowds didn't amount to more than a couple of dozen people, if even that. There were no violent confrontations between the police and the demonstrators. The police were watchful, restrained. They didn't provoke confrontation or stone-throwing. I doubt that there were any arrests.

*Q: Well, I mean we've already gone through the overthrow of Saddam and all. I mean what was there to revolt against?*

ALBIN: That's a good question, but let me finish my point about the tribes. The men who came out into the street, and made speeches at the public podium in Ramadi and maybe Fallujah and other towns were sheikhs who wanted to grab power from the civilian authorities just described. There were seeks like the one we called the Gucci sheikh, Ali Hatem, the favorite of the BBC with his silk dishdasha and his pastel keffiyeh. My God, the guy was a joke. No one but the Western media took him seriously. We advised our commander to ignore anything he said. He had no following in Anbar or in Baghdad, but for a while he was on the news daily. We said, "Colonel, come here a moment, please, and watch this." He came into the TOC to watch the live feeds from the Scan Eagle drones. "How many people do you see? Maybe 200? Who are they? Kids, maybe a

couple of hundred kids at most. That's all that's happening. Look at the podium. Who's at the podium stirring them up? Ali Hatem, Hamid Hayis and a couple of other out-of-towners. They have no influence locally. They have no followers in town or at the university." So it went during the Arab Spring in Anbar. My point is that tribal influence, at least in Anbar, was at a very low level. Today, this has evolved as Maliki, as Prime Minister Maliki, has developed a style of government that has become more and more Shia-based and less and less inclusive of Sunnis. A couple of violent events have taken place recently, not in Anbar Province so much as, as in Diyala and Saladin provinces. You will see lots and lots of people in the streets of Ramadi and Fallujah. Are these demonstrators tribal? Yes, they are tribal. In the same sense that Anbar province is tribal. Is it a tribally motivated protest against a Maliki government in Baghdad? No, it is not tribally motivated. It is motivated by issues of unfairness vis-à-vis the Sunni population in general. The violence that took place in some of these other provinces, was because of the lack of public services like electricity, clean water, viable schools and the like. The entire country had been suffering under inefficient and corrupt administration for years. People are now fed up with the government. They perceive the problem now as sectarian discrimination. That's what's bringing people out. Yes, they're tribal people, but all of Anbar is tribal but the grievances are not necessarily tribal grievances. I wanted to clear that point up.

Let's talk about our last few months in Iraq and the US commitment to the country. I won't go into political or diplomatic negotiations that took place between Maliki and, and the US Administration. We know from the press that the negotiations boiled down to the roadblock over the issue of guaranteeing the judicial immunity of American forces in Iraq after the 31<sup>st</sup> of December withdrawal. That's something that really doesn't interest me in this context. But what did interest me very, very much, and what I think I had an influence on, was what American stance should be after December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2011. Many proposals appeared in the press and in the classified traffic that I was reading. The Army, the Embassy and the media were full of speculation about what our role should be. I read all this stuff and thought most of it hot air. Because what the Iraqis really needed at base was very simple: I called it TLC (tender, loving care). So what I did was write some memos and talk to as many people as possible about my views of what we ought to be doing. Very simple views. I was in a lot of meetings with a lot of high-level people. The POLAD, the political advisor, for the division flew into our facility frequently. The deputy division commander, the one-star, came. The division commander, the two-star, came. We had multiple meetings with the PRT (i.e. State Department) director. We talked this idea over. And what was the idea? The idea was very simple. What the Iraqis need after December 31<sup>st</sup> was TLC. Iraq is a wealthy country that can afford anything it wants to buy. It can buy an electricity infrastructure, it can afford an education infrastructure from primary all the way to medical school. It can afford anything it wants. It can afford armies, it can afford F-15's, F-16's. It can afford Abrams tanks. It can afford the latest of the latest. Anything we want to sell 'em, commercially, armaments, they can buy. Iraqis don't need advising and assisting anymore. The Iraqis don't need anything except one thing: *affirmation that America cares about Iraq*; that America wants to be Iraq's friend, Iraq's partner in reconstruction. We want to help Iraq get into the 21<sup>st</sup> century after decades of isolation from the world. And that doesn't cost many billions of

dollars. It would cost a couple of billion per year. We don't need a big USAID mission. We don't need a big Army-military mission. We need a lot of Iraqi Army officers, naval officers, police officers, soldiers, sergeants, non-commissioned officers, to flood our training courses in the United States. Bring 'em over in droves. Show 'em, machinery, show 'em arms, show 'em a good time. Let 'em know that we care about them. Similarly on the civilian side. Bring university professors over and university students. Bring 'em over by the tens of thousands. In fact, there was a program in Maliki's office, the 10,000 Student Program, to bring 10,000 students to the UK and the U.S. in order to do their BA's, their MA's, and their PhD's. Unfortunately, 10,000 has kind of trickled down to 2,000, but over the course of time programs are being set up to do that. And that's a wonderful thing. There were only two things that Iraq needed, fundamentally needed: education and stability. If Maliki's government did not want to sign a status of forces agreement with us that would have carried us through 2012, 2013, on into the future, then at least our service attachés at the embassy in Baghdad could make sure that we *maximize* the number of NCO's, and officers coming here for training. Similarly, the Fulbright Programs in ECA, Education and Cultural Affairs, and all the other bureaucratic elements of the embassy should open the doors to Iraqi students, and to the professoriate to come and take advantage of American campuses. What happened instead was that in December of 2011 we withdrew. Lock, stock, and bloody barrel we withdrew. And left no coherent policy, weak ambassadors, an embassy, a military force that didn't exist after December 31<sup>st</sup>. I read statistics in The Post and other places mentioning a military contingent in the hundreds. That won't cut it. An embassy workforce that by now, by the end of this fiscal year will have closed down the USAID mission. Now, AID is a useless fifth wheel, as I have said earlier. However, they do keep *links* open between Washington and Baghdad. They do serve a communication function, if not a development and reconstruction function. So the entire office, from what I've been told by people who work in AID, is that the American staff, by the end of September this next month, will have been withdrawn from Baghdad. And the whole office will be run by FSN's. I'm fine with that. But FSNs are not American Foreign Service Officers. USAID officers are. Furthermore, we know that diplomatic relations between the United States and Iraq are as bad or worse than they were at certain times during Saddam's regime. It seems as though *Saddam* is still in power. We have practically no good relations with Iraq. The State Department doesn't even count in current diplomacy. Relations between our two countries are conducted from Washington, not from *the damn embassy!* If Obama wants to say something to Maliki, he *sends somebody* from Washington! So much for this billion dollar emerald palace, as Chandrasekaran called it. So anyway, that's my frustration about that. With regard to TLC, how can you put hands on the Iraqi population when State Department people are too chicken-shit to leave the embassy? And State Department, regional security forces officers, are frightened to give Iraqis businesslike access to the embassy? When the State Department is too chicken-shit to open a consulate in Basra or a consulate in Mosul, or a consulate in Ramadi? What kind of foreign policy can you have under these conditions? OK, that's number one.

Number two, with regard to the services, I mean the armed forces, here's a bit of wisdom for the next war. How do you turn a two-year war into a ten-year war? And how do you turn a one hundred million dollar war into a one trillion dollar war? There are two secrets



to this transformation. One is called *force protection* and the other is called *OPSEC* (operational security). Force protection secures Americans, civilian or military, inside wires, in the stockade, behind Hesco barriers. That's force protection. It runs counter to the COIN strategy that I tried to describe in the last couple of sessions, where the idea is to get out into the population. Getting out works to a degree if you have a four-vehicle MRAP convoy. But just try to get me to put on a vest and Kevlar to walk down the street in a village or Ramadi or Haditha to buy the morning paper. Impossible. Instead, I have to pay the garbage man to bring it onto base. I remember walking our perimeter with Colonel Jennings. We walked to the edge of the city (Ramadi). I said, "Look, Colonel, why don't you let me walk over there and have a look at that souk on a Thursday night. I'll bet there's a bookstore or two in there. I'll bet there's a teashop. Let me go sit in the teashop for an hour. Please? Please?"

He said, "Are you kidding me? I couldn't do that. You'd be kidnapped. You'd be shot."

All right, so that's Force Protection. That's only one little example of the absurdities of Forced Protection. Now, OPSEC. That *really* ignites me.

*Q: What does that mean?*

ALBIN: It means Operational Security. It means I can't tell you what I know and you can't tell me what you know because what I know is *classified* and what you know is *classified*. I'm barred technically from communicating. Barred by regulation too. And if I try to bend the rules, I'm scolded. OPSEC leads to stupidities like making it impossible to share information on a DoD website, on a DoD computer, by means of a thumb drive. All thumb drives were confiscated and the USB ports on our computers were blocked.

*Q: You mean the storage device.*

ALBIN: Yes, they're called thumb drives or flash drives.

*Q: Yeah.*

ALBIN: All of them were confiscated. And in some cases the IT (information technology) specialist would come around to offices to plug the USB ports with something like chewing gum. They blocked the portals. And now I hear on the radio, on my favorite radio station, 1500 am, Federal News Radio. *Man*, do you get an earful when you listen to that station. Anyway, I heard on Federal News Radio that the new Tough Books are manufactured without portals for external memory devices. What this means is that information sharing and collaboration in the Armed Services and between the Services and the civilian population such as the press and academia is a dead letter. You simply can't communicate any more. Once again the government has shot itself in the foot. So now DOD is controlled by IT security fanatics, just like State is controlled by Diplomatic Security Nazis, all of which effectively shut down the government. The same is true for access to outside media. We were restrained from accessing the international media as well as the Iraqi and Arab media. What this means is that the United States

might as well retreat to isolationism. Which is just as well, since isolation is the declared policy of the current Administration. All of this is happening in an age where the computer and the Internet are touted as great facilitators to sharing knowledge around the world. What we have done is blockade these marvelous possibilities. So, if you want to turn a 100 million dollar war into a trillion dollar war you place security barriers at every crossroads of communications. You force soldiers to walk from desk to desk and base to base for collaboration, you prevent them from going outside their FOB for fear of getting hurt. In summary, it's Force Protection and Operational Security that gives us the ten-year war in Iraq and the thirteen-year war in Afghanistan. And it's why the next wars will be fought not by humans but by robots on land and sea and in the air.

*Q: OK, where do we go from here?*

ALBIN: All right. Where do you want to go?

*Q: Well, I'm thinking this might -- why don't we leave it at this for now and, you know, if there's something you want to add later on, first place, you can add it on to your account, because we'll send you a whole transcript.*

ALBIN: Oh marvelous, good.

*Q: And then you can add it. And if you feel at that point there's anything else you really want to develop by talking we can do it. But why don't we call it quits for now?*

ALBIN: Fine. Fine.

*Q: Great.*

ALBIN: That's excellent. There's one comment I want to make at the end. I made a note of it here because it was pretty much a distillation of opinion. What -- in the context of war -- is the difference between State Department's approach and the Army's approach to conflict? They both face the same kinetic and reconstruction requirements. Yet, they have two different approaches because they're too different agencies with two different traditions. They approach things differently. But there is a kind of a meta-difference that distinguishes State from the Army. I'm talking about the Big Army now, not Special Forces. The Army, as I have observed it, at the officer level, colonel on down -- actually general on down -- recognizes that it doesn't know what's going on out there. It doesn't know who these people are. It comes in fresh with an institutional curiosity about the enemy, the society, the country they are fighting in. They listen and learn in order to minimize damage and ultimately win. State Department, on the other hand, comes in with a "know it all" attitude. Their psychology is, "We know it all already. We cannot learn anything because we know it all already." Army officers are always asking questions. State Department people never ask questions, except when it's necessary to put the locals' answers into cables back to Washington. The cable is the product, the goal. The diplomat filters the answers in accordance with his mastery of ground truth. State Department asks questions of the local sheikhs, the local leaders, the local politicians, the local professors,

the local journalists, in order to put their opinions into a cable and not to increase his own or Washington's overall understanding of the world.

*Q: Well, I think part of that is obviously personality driven. Some people -- I, I, I have not been able to -- but I've always found that going from one post to another is, is fascinating because you're learning.*

ALBIN: It is, mm, mm. Well, I hope that's generally the case with our diplomats.

*Q: Well, I -- yeah, it's personality.*

ALBIN: Yes.

*Q: OK Mike.*

ALBIN: Thank you very much, I appreciate your time.

*End of interview*